Secret theatre

Off-the-grid performance practices in socialist Poland and Czechoslovakia

Ryabets, O.

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SECRET THEATRE: OFF-THE-GRID PERFORMANCE PRACTICES IN SOCIALIST POLAND AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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**Introduction**

In her autobiography, the superstar of the Bolshoi Ballet, Maya Plisetskaya, relayed the confusion around numerous dinner invitations sent to her by foreign embassies in the late-Soviet decades (1953–1991). While accepting such invitations during Stalin's lifetime would mean, in the ballerina's words, a “one-way ticket to Siberia ...” 1, the appropriate reaction became less obvious from 1953, which marked the year of Stalin’s death and the beginning of relatively liberal reforms in the USSR, known as the Thaw. Plisetskaya wrote about how she would receive a phone call from the theatre director's office, informing her of a specific invitation. She recalled the type of advice that would accompany this conversation: “It is not recommended that you go. However, decide for yourself. But I wouldn't go. We, just to be on the safe side, have already reported that you are busy.” 2 On other occasions, though, the process would be inverted, and the ballerina would be informed that “[t]here was a call from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maya Mikhailovna. It is very important that you be at the French reception tomorrow. The ambassador himself is a big fan of yours.” 3 Plisetskaya eventually realized that her attendance at embassy dinners lay at the crossroads of two powerful government organizations – the KGB and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since both organizations had different interests, the ballerina was alternatively advised to attend or not attend the same type of events.

Plisetskaya's anecdote illustrates a common leitmotif of Soviet life, both within the USSR and in its sphere of influence. One of the characteristics of socialism in the Eastern Bloc 4, starting with the immediate post-World War II period and up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, was an ever-evolving debate over what was allowed. Soviet policy regarding this matter was often inconsistent and opaque, with a high degree of censure and a non-systematic approach. 5 The resulting cultural environment pushed many artists, academics and individualists out of the public eye. The system’s concern with what could and could not be publicly permitted unwittingly enabled the creation of a shadow world: intellectuals and artists began to carry out activities normally intended for the wide public – such as theatre performances or book publishing – in private. Their move to private domains resulted in cultural hybrids, where the public and the private domains coexisted – self-publishing (samizdat), underground universities, apartment theaters, exhibitions and concerts.

These activities and pastimes could have a variety of motivations: from political activism to education, artistic experimentation or entertainment through to a complete removal from the social system. Frequently, these undertakings were decidedly apolitical, yet managed to disrupt the status quo.

Scholars have coined a number of terms for such fringe, off-the-grid practices and the study thereof:

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1 Plisetskaya:1994, 171
2 ibid
3 ibid
4 The Eastern Bloc consisted of Communist-controlled states stretching from Central and Eastern Europe to East and Southeast Asia largely controlled by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It included Poland and former Czechoslovakia.
5 Yurchak:2016
the informal public (Zdravomyslova, Voronkov: 2003), deterritorialized places (Yurchak: 2016), strange places (Heczková, Svatoňová: 2016), islands of freedom (Stárek: 2010), archeology of the everyday (Boym: 2014) and anthropology of the everyday (Sulima: 2000). Although all of these terms address the same types of phenomena, they are not synonymous. For instance, Voronkov’s informal public refers to places of individual freedom as specific locations, while Yurchak’s deterritorialized places are more conceptual in nature. Heczková, Svatoňová and Stárek work in a specifically Czech context, although their terminology could be extended to other regions. For Boym, archeology of the everyday means uncovering a specific type of memory, while Sulima has developed new theories around post-Soviet Polish supermarkets or the aesthetics of children’s rooms.

This study examines such informal practices in Poland and former Czechoslovakia between 1950 and 1989. The analysis focuses on four projects that centered around theatrical performances or similar activities – two Polish and two Czech: the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street (1955–1958, Warsaw), the Separate Theatre (1958–1963, Warsaw), Footprint on the Window (1973–1975, Brno) and the Pataphysics Collegiate of Teplice (1980–1986, Teplice). I analyze each within its respective socio-political context and in relation to the locations in which they took place: private apartments or public areas. My sources come from two years of work in Prague and six months in Warsaw, and they combine scholarly studies in Czech, Polish, Russian, English and French, along with out-of-print editions, underground press, personal archives and interviews. In addition, I have spent five years living and working as a theatre director in Prague – this may explain, in part, the somewhat more prevalent number of Czech cultural references and historical examples in my study.

While a contribution to the historical debate is not the primary goal of this project, historical positioning is important because my case studies cannot be examined separately from their context. In addition, my use of certain terminology, especially that of Alexei Yurchak, orients my project towards the growing body of works that have refined the understanding of the Soviet Union, such as Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era (2016), edited by Dina Fainberg and Artemy M. Kalinovsky, which includes studies that “complicate Alexei Yurchak's notion that Soviet citizens perceived late socialist reality as quite stable” among others. This contribution on the part of my project is also timely against the backdrop of contemporary media's framing of the Cold War era and a so-called New Cold War.

While the term New Cold War is of fairly recent coinage, the topic has already managed to elicit a number of scholarly articles. In the most recent one to date (2018), the author Vasile Rotaru has observed a “resuscitation” of Cold War narratives in contemporary Russia. Others, such as Ionela Maria Ciolan, have claimed that the New Cold War is a “... symbolic concept used to strengthen Russia’s great power narrative.” In view of observations such as these, it becomes important to keep in mind the reality behind the original Cold War rhetoric. Just as during the 1980s, it is easy to fall back on binary interpretations of complex cultural processes. To avoid this, historian Patryk Babiracki has advised an examination “not at the very top, but mid-level, among the people who lived the experience on both sides.” Although in Babiracki’s case, this means careful consideration of ground-level experiences of “individual soviet officials, cultural figures, and activists drawn into the process of remaking Polish culture,” I take a cue from him when it comes to re-evaluating the binary interpretations of the history of Eastern Bloc countries and the Soviet Union. Babiracki has explained that “[s]cholars have closely studied the effects of Soviet actions in eastern Europe; but these same
Soviet actions were often expected to speak alone about the expansive nature of the Soviet system.” Babiracki, along with other scholars, such as Alexei Yurchak, has advised a more nuanced approach.

**Research Question**

I have set up several limitations in order to delineate my case studies from other, closely related types of activities. To this end, my case studies are not examples of self-defined oppositional projects or movements, such as Czech Charta 77 or Polish Solidarność nor are they projects undertaken by well-known or established artists, such as Vlasta Chramostová, Václav Havel, Tadeusz Kantor or Miron Białoszewski (at a later stage in his career). They come close to subcultures as defined by Juliane Fürst in her work on *dropping out* of Socialism because Fürst discusses “the creation of alternative spheres.” However, my case studies do not quite fit Fürst's definition, because, rather than choosing “non-participation” (as the cases in her book), the creators of my case studies chose rather to participate differently by rearranging (or, to use the terminology of cognitive studies, re-blending) various elements of the main culture. This is especially true in Eduard Váček's case (see Chapter 3).

From the perspective of cognitive studies, namely the advanced blending theory, humans are able to collectively construct and inhabit an imaginary space or a world – for example, during a theatre performance such a space is created through the collaboration between the actors, the technicians and the audience. Constructing a theory of imaginary worlds, J.P. Wolf defined them as “the surroundings and places experienced by a fictional character (or which could be experienced by one) that together constitute a unified sense of place with is ontologically different from the actual, material, and so-called 'real' world” which may be “…as large as a universe, or as small as an isolated town.” As I discuss later on, imaginary spaces and their relation to reality also appear in the work of Michel Foucault (heterotopia) and Henri Lefebvre (representational space). In post-soviet scholarship, we can see them in Yurchak's Imaginary West and *deteriorialization*, Heczková/Svatonová's *strange places* or Roch Sulima's anthropology of Polish everyday life. According to theories of imaginary worlds and studies of imagination in cognitive science, an imaginary world is closely related to the so-called “real” or what Lefebvre called “physical” world.

In view of the above, this study asks the following: can Theatre on Tarczyńska Street, the Separate Theatre, Footprint on the Window and the Pataphysics Collegiate of Teplice be interpreted as imaginary spaces that bypass reality by engaging multiple inversions of it? In other words, could they be interpreted as imaginary micro-worlds constructed on several separate occasions through interventions into the collective cognitive blends of the participants? What does this interpretation mean to Yurchak's notion of deteriorialization?

**Central Concepts**

This project draws on recent insights in sociological, anthropological and cultural-historical studies to explain how personal identity formation relates to space and to delve into the informal performative projects in Soviet-influenced societies. To understand how space and identity interact within such phenomena as apartment theaters (Ch.2) or public performances (Ch.3), I rely on Alexei Yurchak’s notion of *deteriorialization* – a term that Yurchak borrows from Mikhail Bakhtin and which, in both Yurchak’s and my contexts, means “…conceptual spaces that the system cannot describe and does not expect, because they do not coincide with its discourse, but are not in opposition to it.” To describe

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11Ibid
12See Fürst:2016
13See McConachie and Hart:2006, Introduction
14Wolf:2017, 377 (quoted in Hynes)
15ibid
16Yurchak:2016, 16
how such deterritorialized spaces appear within a home, I build on Michel Foucault’s thinking about heterotopias – spaces of otherness, where mainstream reality does not apply. A heterotopia is traditionally a place that is removed from society’s established system – for instance, a prison, a graveyard or a theatre. In such places, behaviors are structured differently than in the primary reality. In this study, I am interested in how a heterotopical space is constructed. For example, this occurs (as I discuss in detail in Ch.2) when a public lecture, theatre show or concert is delivered in a private apartment. After inspecting domestic heterotopias, I turn to deterritorialized spaces outside the domestic sphere. To approach these, I rely on a new term from Czech scholarship that describes heterotopical pockets in the everyday cultural life of socialist Czechoslovakia. This term is strange places, and it was coined in 2016 by Czech cultural analysts Libuše Heczková and Kateřina Svatoňová. A strange place is closely related to a heterotopia, but differs in one important way: a heterotopia is a space in which different rules apply and in which our behavior is adjusted accordingly (for example, in a theatre, we act differently than in normal life), whereas a strange place is a regular space that is, inversely to a heterotopia, rendered strange by a particular set of irregular behaviors (for example, a pub chosen as a site for an event is transformed). To elaborate on how strange places were formed within a socialist system, I look to a 2002 study by Russian scholars Elena Zdravomyslova and Viktor Voronkov. Their study defines the phenomenon of the informal public as a sphere of individual freedom and an alternative to the binary private-public. I introduce each notion in more detail within the appropriate chapters.

These terms – “strange places,” “heterotopia” and “deterritorialization” – help us to understand how off-the-grid performance cultures in Eastern-Bloc Czechoslovakia and Poland worked. In addition, this study operates under the overall notions of non-narrative identity and soviet system. These two concepts provide the foundational background to my analysis. For this reason, I define both ideas here in the introduction and then refer back to them throughout the study.

The Soviet System
Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, along with Johnathan Bolton, Natalia Lebina and others to whose analyses I return in the later chapters, takes issue with binary terminology that interprets Soviet and socialist history in terms of a series of oppositions, such as dissident-regime, oppression-freedom, and so on. Yurchak employs the term system, rather than regime or something similar, to address the structure of Soviet society. He takes his time to explain what he means by “system,” and I will pause here to provide a definition as well. According to Yurchak, “[u]nder ‘system’ we understand a configuration of socio-cultural, political, economic, legal, ideological, official, unofficial, public, personal and other types of relations, institutions, identifications and meanings, from which the living space of citizens is composed.” This set of characteristics developed from the fact that “… the ‘Soviet system’ constantly changed and experienced internal shifts …” As a result of this flux, the system “… included not only strict principles, norms and rules and not only declared ideological attitudes and values, but also a multitude of internal contradictions to these norms, rules, attitudes and values. It was full of internal paradoxes, unpredictability and unexpected possibilities, including the potential
possibility to collapse quite quickly under certain conditions (as happened at the end of perestroika).”

Such a system allowed for the creation of the phenomena I address in this study, and for this reason, it is important to understand how this system functioned.

Yurchak uses the term to talk about the Soviet Union and Soviet Russia in particular. However, as Bolton confirms, the nature of Soviet-style socialism was just as complex and fluctuating in other countries. For instance, we can observe this system at work in post-1968 Czechoslovakia, where the occupation resulted in, at first glance, a straightforward occupants-victims situation but, on closer examination, caused vertical and horizontal societal shifts, generated a theatrical double-ness in political circles and engendered a contradictory new social stratum. As an example of the systematic paradox and unpredictability, we can look at the societal flip, which resulted in the post-1968 wave of professional purges in former Czechoslovakia (I return to these in some detail in Chapter 1). Following the invasion by the Warsaw Pact troops, a large number of people lost their jobs, starting with the party ranks and moving on to various professional organizations. The change landed many devoted communists in the same boat as the dissidents, since both of these groups suddenly found themselves in a similar situation: unemployed and out of grace with the Communist Party. Eduard Vácek, whose project I address in Chapter 3, recalls how the purges affected his own family:

Time passed quietly, but when the year 1968 came, along with the entry of the so-called friendly troops, the situation in our family changed ... My father was thrown out of the party and had a nervous breakdown as a result of this sudden termination of his career. He went into disability retirement, had trouble with his heart and never recovered. Those of his friends who were also ejected from the Party started to meet up in our house, drinking and nostalgically remembering the “old times.”

The case of Vácek's father is an individual example of a shift within the entire system, which declared a punishable offense today that which only yesterday was encouraged. The motivation for post-1968 purges is fairly clear: they were an extension of the process that began with the invasion. However, the regulating forces of such shifts where frequently unpredictable and could not be plausibly explained even by the party itself. In Czech scholarship, such processes are sometimes described as a theatre of the absurd, not only because of their public, performative nature but also because, as Bolton explains, they “... were not only intended to choose people for further persecution, but created a institutionalized a strange type of political theatre, based on ritual humiliation and showcase of insincere obedience, and all of this expressed itself in the absurd newspeak of bureaucratic communism.” In other words, the framework of the system remained the same (Socialist Czechoslovakia), but the system itself experienced an internal shift. This change caused rifts which, as I explore in later chapters, allowed for the growth of non-oppositional parallel worlds.

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22“...она включала в себя не только строгие принципы, нормы и правила и не только заявленные идеологические установки и ценностии, но и множество внутренних противоречий этим нормам, правилам, установкам и ценностям. Она была полна внутренних парадоксов, непредсказуемостей и неожиданных возможностей, включая потенциональную возможность довольно быстро разрушиться при введении определенных условий (что и произошло в конце перестройки).” (Юрчак:2016, 37)

23Just, Bolton, Pánek, Tůma et al, Vaněk
24Year of invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of the Warsaw Pact
25Vácek:2015, see Appendix A of this study
26Bolton:2015, 92
**Non-Narrative Identity**

In addition to the idea of *Soviet system*, I rely on the concept of *non-narrative identity* as a foundational notion of this study. I borrow the term from cognitive science and psychology and then build upon it with the assistance from Gilles Deleuze. The cognitive scientist Mark Turner explains an “identity” as “a compression, which we carry around with us and expand on the spot to fit what we need to think about.”\(^{27}\) It is a useful mechanism that allows us to manage large mental webs, which span long time periods and include millions of connections. According to Turner, “an idea like *the cyclic day or the Supreme Court of the United States* is a manufactured, compressed identity.”\(^{28}\) The following is an example of how our minds compress large quantities of data into identities: we are not capable of processing all the days we ever experienced or will experience. To manage such a large amount of information, we take all the individual days and compress them into an idea of a cyclic, repeatable day. This is now an identity.

Our notion of a stable self is also such an identity. The self is a single idea that is actually a compression of many different selves over a long stretch of time: past, present and future. Turner argues here that there are two sides to a self – the one we perceive as a stable, single identity and the other, which is a vast and fluctuating mental web. The seemingly stable identity is one we can easily narrate – evidenced by our ability to compose autobiographies. The mental web, however, seems to be generally less available to our consciousness and is thus not easily (or at all) communicated. In other words, we are in possession of a narrative and a non-narrative self.

Identities of self are necessarily, also, cultural identities. According to the psychologists Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean (2013), “narrative identity is a person’s internalized and evolving life-story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of meaning.”\(^{29}\) Narrative identity is “exquisitely contextualized in culture,”\(^{30}\) depending on the stories we tell, and it presents “semantic conclusions from episodic information.”\(^{31}\) Turner confirms that “[c]ultures ferociously support, maintain and enforce such blended conceptions of an abiding self. Cultures invest a great deal of language in providing fixed names to the personal self in the blend,” and “[s]trong rituals are invented by culture to magnify and increase the analogical connections over time, such as birthdays.”\(^{32}\)

However, while this identity is indispensable for our ability to manage the vast mental web of “self,” it necessarily excludes an entire range of experiences that are anachronistic, episodic, paradoxical, impossible to verbalize and otherwise unfit to integrate into a narrative to be shared with others. McAdams and McLean say that it is the ability to gloss over “contradictions and paradoxes of life experiences.”\(^{33}\) The more inclusive alternative would be what Marek Pieniazek calls a “non-narrative method of constructing identity.”\(^{34}\) In essence, the creation of deterritorialized spaces and heterotopias is the process of constructing such non-narrative identities. For example, when Miron Białoszewski developed his apartment theatre, he created a space where his (and his visitors’ and co-creators’) non-narrative selves could flourish away from prying eyes (see Chapter 2).

Gilles Deleuze echoes this cognitive duality in his essay *Politics*, where he identifies two sets of “lines”

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27Turner:2014, 59
28ibid.; italics in original
29Adams, McLean:2013, 235
30ibid
31ibid
32Turner:2014, 65
33McAdams and McLean:2013, 235
34“...o nienarracyjnym sposobie konstruowania tożsamości we współczesnej kulturze...” (Pieniążek:2010, 88)
that make up who we are. One – the line of, say, school or work – is rigid and segmented, and it is our official history. The other is a “molecular” flow. Deleuze writes that “[m]any things happen along this second line – becomings, micro-becomings – that don’t have the same rhythm as our ‘history.’” Rather than a line per se, this is an ephemeral current composed of a myriad of moments too small to notice in isolation. This current forms a background to our official history in the form of everyday life, especially private and domestic life, which is the source of Deleuze's “molecular flow.” From the above, it follows that to understand narrative identity, we must explore the public, the narrative, the chronological and the semantic, since narrative identity “builds slowly over time as people tell stories about their experiences to and with others.” By contrast, to understand the non-narrative, we must turn our attention away from the public and the describable, towards the private, the secret, the anachronistic and the undefinable or unnamable.

The notion of non-narrative identity matters to my analysis of Czech and Polish projects because it helps to explain why these projects were necessary and satisfying for their creators and audiences. While narrative identity can be rigid and heavily dependent on external social forces (for example, if a CEO is downsized from her job, then she is no longer a CEO), the non-narrative component of human identity (the part of the CEO that is not affected by things such as downsizing – for instance, the complex range of emotions she experiences when smelling a cinnamon bun) leaves some room when it comes to experimenting with the type of activities I examine in the upcoming chapters. An understanding of the difference between narrative and non-narrative identity construction (and how my case studies operated between the two) helps to illuminate why informal, non-oppositional activities created a sense of freedom for their makers and audiences and how this freedom provided a temporary release from the narrative.

Existing Literature

Between 1989 and today, scholars have produced an undeniably wide scope of literature about informal cultures and everyday life in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc – in Russian, Polish, Czech, German and English, ranging from popular journalism by Mariusz Szczygiel (2007, 2011) to scholarly works by František Černý (2008) and Vladimír Just (2010) or Ivan Klimeš (2016). However, the majority of studies on the topic have focused on one region or dissident activities, and hardly any of these volumes acknowledge and address life beyond and outside the historical narrative. Information on informal practices has been found mostly in personal archives and memoirs, such as those of writer Pavel Kohout (1987), historian Hanna Kirchner (1996), actress Vlasta Chramostová (1999) and poet Miron Białoszewski (2012), as well as collections of interviews (Straková, Linková: 2017; Miroslav Vaněk: 2009). Autobiographic writing and interviews provide us with valuable information about the everyday; however, these recollections remain, by their very nature, constrained to a small group of people and usually one or two locations; moreover, they do not analyze the larger historical, sociological and/or cultural-analytical implications of the narrative.

A number of publications have approached the subject from a wider or scholarly perspective, although none have done so in a cross-cultural and multidisciplinary way, meaning that they focus on one country and do not stray beyond the boundaries of one field (such as history or theatre studies). These publications include Gramatyka i Mistyka (Grammar and Mysticism, 1997), which is Jacek

35Deleuze and Parnet, in During:2008, 173
36McAdams and McLean:2013, 235
37Gramatyka i Mistyka by Jacek Kopciński (1997); Baráky, Soustrovi svobody by Jiří Kostúr and František Čuňas Stárek (2010); Człowiek Miron by Tadeusz Sobolewski (2012); The Kingdom of Insignificance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic by Joanna Nizyńska (2013); Permanentni avantgarda? Surrealismus v Praze by Anja Tippnerová (2014); Kultura a Totalita edited by Ivan Klimeš and Jan Wiendl (2016)
Kopiński’s detailed analysis of Miron Białoszewski’s theatre; Baráky, *Souostroví svobody* (Cottages, Islands of Freedom, 2010), Jiří Kostúr’s and František Čuñas Stárek’s collection of archival materials highlighting Czechoslovak cottage culture; Tadeusz Sobolewski’s *Człowiek Miron* (Person Miron, 2012) and Joanna Nizyńska's *The Kingdom of Insignificance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic* (2013), both of which take a closer look at Białoszewski’s personality; and Anja Tippnerová’s *Permanennti avantgarda? Surrealismus v Praze* (The Permanent Avantgarde? Surrealism in Prague, 2014), which is an analysis of Czech surrealists.

In addition, a growing selection of literature exists on informal culture in the Soviet Union – for instance Vladimir Paperny's *Culture Two* (1985) on space and power; Natalia Lebina's volumes on late-Soviet relationship to identity, gender and everyday life (1999, 2016, 2017); Ilya Utekhin's studies of Soviet communal apartments and everyday urban rituals (2001, 2012); Svetlana Boym's analyses of post-Soviet nostalgia and everyday spaces (1994, 2001); and Alexei Yurchak's book on late-Soviet decades, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* (2006, 2016 in Russian edition, which is the one used in this study). These works provide valuable information on Soviet policies towards identity building and everyday practices, many of which have extended beyond Russia.

This study aims to open scholarly discussion on informal Czech and Polish culture that is both attentive to the reality of life in those conditions and is aware of a larger context that can demonstrate these phenomena as a cross-cultural set of cultural practices. Historian Jonathan Bolton has already offered such a discussion in the introduction to the Czech edition of his *Worlds of Dissent* (2015). Bolton has sought to “offer an alternative to the existing interpretations, which ... perceive [opposition] mainly as a political strategy.” He has moved away from what he calls “narratives” of dissent, which, according to him, necessarily exclude and conceal the more subtle aspects of history. However, Bolton has focused on the everyday lives of famous dissidents, such as Václav Havel; by implication, his work sheds little light on those activities which were not strictly, not even by self-definition, oppositional.

The growing field of informal studies has been a further source of research materials for this thesis. This area is undoubtedly helpful, yet existing studies indicate that my work fills a gap in existing scholarship. For example, an expansive, two-volume collection of essays titled *The Global Encyclopedia of Informality* (2018) and edited by Alena Ledeneva, promises “… to explore society’s open secrets, to comprehend unwritten rules and to uncover informal practices.” However, out of two volumes, only one essay is devoted to Poland and another to the Czech Republic. Neither essay deals with Soviet-era informality. Nevertheless, there are volumes specifically devoted to informal practices in the regions, and they are of interest to me. These volumes include the already-mentioned *Antropologia Codzienności* (The Anthropology of the Everyday, 2000) by Roch Sulima and *Kultura a Totalita IV – Každodennost* (Culture and Totalitarianism IV – The Everyday), which is a 2016 collection of essays on Czechoslovakia. Neither of these, however, is available to a wider, respectively non-Polish or non-Czech audience, nor do these volumes offer a cross-cultural analysis.

My study focuses largely on projects that, in some or other, involve performance. However, perhaps with the exception of Miron Białoszewski’s Separate Theatre, one will not find mention of my case studies in theatre history books. This is not only because of the fringe status of these endeavors but also because they evade categorization, comprising elements of theatre, performance art and urban ritual. At the same time, the theatrical roots of my case studies must be acknowledged. For instance, the Polish projects I analyze were deeply inspired by the French 1920s project *Theatre Art et Action*.

38barak - similar to Russian and Polish *dacha* and also knowns as *chatka* or *chalupa* in Czech

39Bolton:2015, 12

40ibid

41Ledeneva:2018, vii

Some gems I came across along the way include the original 1911 publication of Alfred Jarry's *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien*; hand-typed transcripts of lectures from the underground university that was run by Ivan Havel (Václav's younger brother) in socialist Prague; a manuscript of a collection of short plays by the Prague Surrealists, performed in the apartment of Vratislav Effenberger sometime in the 1920s; and recordings of Miron Biłoszewski staging his Separate Theatre plays for radio.

Each of these studies and sources has informed and enriched my thinking about the history of Czech and Polish performance practices. However, while they have chronicled and isolated instances, they have not examined what I highlight as perennial to Central and Eastern European underground culture: its wave of activity traceable across borders and decades. My project examines informal performances not as separate historical occurrences but as a whole. In this way, my study fills a gap in the current understanding of post-WWII Polish and Czech culture as well as the Soviet system in general.

It is important to note that Yurchak, along with many others whose work contributes to my conceptual framework, is a Russian-American scholar writing about Soviet Russia. I therefore apply his (and others’) concepts to my material carefully and with due attention paid to the nuance with which the Soviet system (homogenous to a degree) manifested itself in Poland and former Czechoslovakia. At the same time, as Svetlana Boym has pointed out, “[w]hile there are vast differences between the USSR and Eastern and Central Europe, one could speak about one common feature of the alternative intellectual life in these countries from the 1960s to the 1980s” a development of ‘counter-memory’ that laid a foundation of democratic resistance and arguably was a prototype of a public sphere that already emerged under the Communist regime.”42 In this way, when we discuss the emergence of the performative shift, heterotopias or strange places across Eastern and Central Europe, we can arrive at conclusions that are parallel to (though not synonymous with) post-Soviet scholarship.

**Analytical Structure**

The study consists of three chapters, bracketed by this Introduction and the final Concluding Notes. I have also included an English translation of my interview with Eduard Váček, which is integral to Chapter 3, as an Appendix. Chapter 1 deals with the historical context. In Chapters 2 and 3, I offer a cross-disciplinary reading of the following case studies: the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street (Warsaw, 1955–1958), the Separate Theatre (Warsaw, 1958–1963), Footprint on a Window (Brno, 1973–1975) and the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate (Teplice, 1980–1986).

Chapter 1 concerns itself with a stretch of Polish and Czech history from the end of World War II (1945) to the formation of Solidarity (1980) and the Velvet Revolution (1989). I provide relevant definitions – such as the performative shift, deterritorialization and places of vnenahodimost – which

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42Boym:2001, 61
are applied in the analysis of case studies in later chapters. This chapter also explains social changes that were instrumental in the establishment of the specific cultural environment of the late Soviet Union. The idiosyncrasies of this cultural environment are largely responsible for the need for heterotopical apartment theaters or strange places on the one hand and, on the other, the systematic inconsistencies that allowed such projects to exist.

Chapter 2 looks at apartments as places of deterritorialization or heterotopia. I rely on recent theories of cognition to explain how the non-narrative self (the aspect of human self-identity that cannot be narrated; see Central Concepts above) is formed in the context of the domestic space. Then, I zoom in on the history of a specific type of apartment housing: that in socialist cities. I examine how this highly specific cognitive blend emerged and I explain how this particular environment allowed for heterotopical bubbles to appear. In the final section, I explain how performance experiments turned a select set of socialist-era apartments into heterotopias. Among the apartment experiments discussed, I devote special attention to three apartments where the performance space was instrumental in the creation of the project – so, rather than ending up in an apartment for, say, security reasons, the projects were inspired by the apartments that housed them. In chronological order, these are the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street (Warsaw), Separate Theatre (Warsaw) and Footprint on the Window (Brno).

In Chapter 3, I continue to identify off-the-grid practices; however, I take them out of the apartment. This chapter introduces the notions of strange places and the informal public. It is then devoted to the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate, an independent group of artists and intellectuals founded by the Czech writer and chief pataphysician, Eduard Váček. Founded at the beginning of the 1980s, the group was forced to pause their activities with Váček's arrest and imprisonment in 1986 but later resumed meetings and is active to this day. This chapter unpacks the group's founding philosophy – Alfred Jarry's pataphysics – and analyzes how the group materialized Jarry's theories by way of focusing on events staged by the group. The chapter demonstrates how Váček's interpretation of Jarry allowed the Collegiate to deterritorialize public spaces (such as the bus or the park pond). This last chapter of my project is more condensed, with a focus on one case study, and it is accompanied by Váček's interview. Concluding Notes are devoted to the discussion of the outcomes and impact of this study.

Chapter 1: History of Public Imagination – 1945 – 1989

1.1 Chapter Introduction

Here is an old joke: a Polish dog and a Czechoslovak dog meet at the border and ask each other why they are each crossing to the opposite side. The Polish dog says, “I go to your country because I want to eat,” and the Czechoslovak dogs says, “I go to your country because I want to howl.” This pre-1989 joke would receive a smirk from someone in Warsaw or Prague, but might not make much sense to a Canadian, for example. However, it refers to a real historical situation – the citizens of both countries perceived socialist Czechoslovakia as a wealthier, but more tightly censored country and Poland as a poor, yet liberal place. Meanwhile, to a Soviet citizen both countries were examples of states that, by comparison to Soviet republics, were liberal and wealthy. At the same time, from a Soviet point of view, there was a clear distinction between a country like Poland and a truly “western” one, for instance France. That is because both Poland and Czechoslovakia fell within the Soviet sphere of influence and were more accessible than countries firmly beyond the Iron Curtain, such as Great Britain or the United States. Soviet folklore had a joke about this, too: “A chicken is not a bird, Prague is not abroad.” This type of humor not only hints at economic and political realities of the time, but also reveals something about public perception. In other words, the above-mentioned jokes permit

43 Курица не птица Прага не заграница [Rus.]
glimpses of how Poland or Czechoslovakia were imagined in popular thinking during the last decades of the USSR. These imaginary countries are the subjects of this chapter.

More specifically, I focus on how space was imagined in the places and time of my case studies. The reason for this choice is that the key concepts I rely on for my analysis – deterritorialization, heterotopia or strange place, among others – are all spatial terms. In addition, terminology borrowed by me from Alexei Yurchak (deterritorialization, vnenahodimost, the performative shift) is situated in the last decades of Soviet history and should be understood within the appropriate socio-historical context. Most importantly, though, every notion I use to approach my cases denotes not only space – but space that is not material. In other words, the conceptual backbone of this study rests on theories of imagined spaces and a historical background chapter should reflect that. After all, “heterotopias” exist in juxtaposition to “utopias”, “deterritorialization” lies outside of “the system” and “strange places” appear as alternatives to “normalized” ones.

The task of this chapter, then, is two-fold: it provides an overview of space in public imagination and explains historically-specific concepts in context. On the theoretical side, this chapter chiefly concerns itself with the work of Alexei Yurchak and tests his theory in related, yet different contexts of former Czechoslovakia and Poland. The key concepts I adopt from Yurchak’s work are as follows: performative shift, deterritorialization and places of vnenahodimost. I address each of these in detail along with the necessary historical context in the upcoming sections. In brief, however, all of these concepts are social phenomena specific to last decades of Soviet power, which resulted from the previous decades and which are instrumental in my later analysis of case studies. From a historical perspective, this chapter is devoted to a stretch of Polish and Czech history from the end of World War II (1945) to the formation of Polish Solidarity (Solidarność, 1980) and the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution (Sametová revoluce, 1989), relying on a number of studies by Russian, Czech and Polish historians. Specifically, this study coincides with the end of the period of “Normalization” (1968–1989) in Czechoslovakia and the post-“Polish October” (1956) Polish People’s Republic. In the history of the Soviet Union, this period roughly equals the period of Nikita Khrushchev’s de-stalinization (the Thaw) and the subsequent takeover by Leonid Brezhnev. For Poland, we are chiefly concerned with the mid-50s and early 60s, when the country was run by Władysław Gomułka. For the Czech Republic, this study focuses on the period post the 1968 invasion. Although socialism in every country undoubtedly contained its own dynamics, the nature of the Soviet extended power was such that changes in the Soviet Union influenced or colored the tone in the “satellites.” This means that my Polish cases were projects with a backdrop of reformist, post-Stalinist tendencies in the USSR, and the Czech projects were at the time overshadowed by Brezhnev’s tightened control and the subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, what the Soviet republics (and so Yurchak’s timeline) considered to be “mature” socialism by the 1960s, was still fairly new for some other countries of the Eastern Bloc, as they were only postwar acquisitions of the Soviet empire. Therefore, although the system in all three regions was Soviet-style socialism, the reality of the period is more complex and certainly not homogenous.

### The Performative Shift

The historical period coinciding with this study is, according to Yurchak, characterized by what he calls a performative shift, meaning that “in the last decades of Soviet history, the performative

44Babiracki, Lebina, Just, Dabrowski, Davies and so on
45Period following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Allied Troops. Called Normalization because the invasion and subsequent professional purges, arrests and resurgence of censorship were justified as governmental measures to “normalize” the situation in the country.
component of the meaning of ... [authoritative] discourse became more important in most contexts, while the stating component, on the contrary, gradually decreased or became vague, opening up to entirely new, previously unpredictable interpretations."\textsuperscript{46} Yurchak relies on a number of theories, such as John Austin’s performative speech acts and Judith Butler’s work, to assert that “... since the semiotic and sociological components of the performative force act simultaneously, it means that conventional statements can acquire unforeseen meanings ...”\textsuperscript{47} In this way, he writes, performative acts are endowed with “... the ability to undermine existing norms without participating in direct resistance to them.”\textsuperscript{48} Yurchak provides a number of examples\textsuperscript{49} and writes that this shift caused a subsequent normalization of the authoritative discourse in Soviet society, where the form of official slogans, texts and speeches became increasingly standardized. We can observe this across the Eastern Bloc, although the term Normalization meant something slightly different in the Czechoslovak context. Post 1968, the socialist institution became increasingly theatrical, prompting a number of theatrical metaphors used to describe it.\textsuperscript{50}

In Czechoslovak terms, Normalization took the form of an attempt to stabilize the situation in the country, although its content was rather the establishment of a tighter watch by the Soviet Union over its satellite. The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia on the night of August 20, 1968, signaled more clearly than before that the Czech government was limited in its capacity to make independent decisions. The invasion was sudden, but not unexpected, as many Prague residents recalled a heavy, foreboding atmosphere hanging in the air in the months preceding the attack.\textsuperscript{51} The following year therefore brought the start of the performative shift in Czechoslovakia. The process by which this shift took place came to be known as Normalization. The official interpretation of Normalization at the time stated that the liberalistic inclinations of the 1960s were a dangerous would-be coup, and it presented the ongoing socio-political alterations as necessary measures intended to stabilize (normalize) the situation in the country. Broadly speaking, we can see that the regaining of control in the years immediately following the 1968 invasion had an inside-outside aim, meaning that it focused on two things: tightening control within the party and tightening control in society in general. This was essentially achieved with the help of the following tactics: carefully clearing the party ranks of any unfavorable elements, either by expulsion or through threats into submission; rewriting history to alter collective memory in the Party’s favor; and reviving ritualization and Soviet-style pageantry.\textsuperscript{52}

The overall effect of these tactics created a reality in which nothing was as it seemed, and the discrepancy between form and content described by Yurchak in relation to the later decades of Soviet Union became part of everyday reality in Czechoslovakia. The standardization of official discourse in the 1970s also continued the kind of historical reinvention that began just after the war. In his analysis of the theatrical situation in communist Czechoslovakia, Czech theatre historian Vladimir Just recalls that “the accession of Communist power was accompanied by a certain obsession with constantly re-evaluating the past, which was repeatedly interpreted so as to confirm the historical norms of the present development and the legitimacy of the regime. The so-called cultural heritage was analogously

\textsuperscript{46}“...в последние десятилетия советской истории перформативная составляющая смысла этого [авторитетного] дискурса в большинстве контекстов становилась все важнее, а констатирующая составляющая, напротив, постепенно уменьшалась или становилась неопределенной, открываясь для всех новых, ранее непредсказуемых интерпретаций.” (Юрчак:2016, 73)

\textsuperscript{47}“...поскольку семиотическая и социологическая составляющие перформативной силы действуют одновременно, значит, конвенциональные высказывания могут приобретать непредвиденные смыслы...” (Юрчак: 2016, 67)

\textsuperscript{48} “...способностью подрывать существующие нормы, не участвуя в прямом сопротивлении им.” (Юрчак:2016, 67)

\textsuperscript{49}See Юрчак:2016

\textsuperscript{50}Just, Bolton, Yurchak

\textsuperscript{51}See Bolton:2015

\textsuperscript{52}Just, Bolton, De Dubnic, Tůma et al
reinterpreted.”

In addition to specific interference in the cultural sector, which I address later, the rewriting of history and the rearranging of collective memory were to be achieved through a tactic of deliberate ritualization and repetition. Theatrical techniques were therefore found in propaganda apparatus, similarly to propaganda attempts to migrate into theatre, as we will later see. Just as in a theatre, the audience (in this case, the citizens) had to suspend their disbelief and agree to play by the rules of the performance for the duration of the performance. Therefore, rather than speak of these rituals as something “done to the public” by the “regime,” it is more productive here to take them as a mutually agreed-on set of acceptable behaviors that, by the 1970s, was so ingrained in the society as to become automatic. As Just points out, “… [r]egular manifestations, resolutions, processions, meetings and other ritualized celebrations are something that totalitarian regime requires and the citizens accept. With this they confirm not only their role in the system, but also the system in themselves.” This, in effect, summarizes the theatricalization of politics and society, which this section describes – for as the years went on, the ritual lost its original meaning. As Just confirms, “just as these regular rituals, until 1989, became increasingly more formal, they became more theatrical, more performative (performances of power, but also performances before power as well as ironic games at power).” Much like in theatre, these rituals rested on repetition and catharsis, apart from the script. Examples of these types of events are state-organized ritualistic actions, such as a massive manifestation Forward, not a Step Back! (1948). These events began to occur almost immediately after the communist coup in 1948 and were repeated regularly, progressively solidifying in form and losing in content. Just after the war, these were large-scale citizen gatherings – in essence, parades with flags and signs that intended to demonstrate the citizens’ support for the new government. However, by the 1970s, these events lost most of their claim to sincerity. By then, they were not much more than well-rehearsed performances – and collectively another element in the theatricalized environment of the last two decades before the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

These rituals, similarly to a classical theatre play, followed a written script and, not unlike the Greek tragedies and comedies, which were designed to encourage citizens to abide by the law, had their own set of goals and priorities. In De Dubnic’s chapter on Mass Agitation, he cites the decision of the Central Committee of the CPCS made in April, 1950, stating “… that mass agitation should foster the following:

1. the socialist consciousness of all workers;
2. patriotic feeling;
3. the feeling of proletarian internationalism; and
4. love of the great Soviet Union”

The performative shift could also be observed in changing attitudes towards public space. Postwar Eastern Bloc cities, especially Warsaw, were subject to Soviet architectural interferences, which included the above-mentioned massive Stalin monument in Prague or the Palace of Culture in Warsaw. Ilya Utekhin explains that, in Soviet times, large-scale open public spaces served a specific system-confirming role. For instance, places such as the Red Square in Moscow, which were sites for parades

53Just:2010, 58
54ibid
55ibid
56Kůpředu, Zpatky ani Krok!
57de Dubnic:1960, 38
and demonstrations, carried with them “... a sacred centre of the festive universe ...”58 where “... the people passing by the stands were easily aware of themselves as ‘we;’ they felt their involvement in the great state, and the grand scale of imperial architecture contributed to this as much as possible.”59 This effect was a combination of architectural organization and the way the space was then filled. For example, Utekhin notes that “… large open spaces in the centre of the city or even just straight and wide streets with aligned buildings, in principle, refer to centralized power: who else could have laid these avenues and boulevards through the confusion of streets and buildings, which arose once by themselves?”60 These large open spaces were filled with portraits of party leaders or large-scale propaganda stands. However, Yurchak notes that from the 1960s onward, the content of these propaganda materials became unreadable to the general public in any literal way: “… before the beginning of perestroika, the frozen forms of visual ideological representations – banners with political slogans, campaign stands, portraits of the party leadership of the country – were not taken literally by the majority of Soviet citizens … these slogans were ‘invisible’ to pedestrians ...”61 In other words, the form remained, but the actual meaning of communist slogans was no longer noticeable, thus dampening the earlier sacredness of Soviet public space described by Utekhin. To Yurchak, the formalistic ritualization of Soviet ideology is an important symptom of the performative shift, and this shift, as we will see shortly, was instrumental in the enabling of the projects discussed in the following chapters.

**Deterritorialization and Vnenahodimost**

According to Yurchak, one of the side effects of the performative shift was the creation of what he terms “places of vnenahodimost” (deterritorialization).62 In this study, places of vnenahodimost serve as an umbrella term. In the rest of the chapters, I present a selection of postwar projects as separate, distinct types of such places. In the introduction to the Russian edition of Yurchak’s books, Beljaev defines places of vnenahodimost in the following way:

The “normal” Soviet person is neither an activist nor a dissident. They participate in the formation and reproduction of the official ideological discourse – they do this primarily at the level of the form of statements, while giving them new, unexpected meanings. As a result of this attitude towards the utterances and rituals of the Soviet system, the “normal person” creates new spaces of free action that the official discourse of the system is unable to describe and which the system does not expect, because they do not coincide with its discourse, but are not in opposition to it. As shown in the book, this particular space of freedom – the author calls them spaces of vnenahodimost – can appear in various contexts – in the stokehold and the office of the Komsomol committee, in the apartment of friends and the laboratory of physicists.63

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58 Утехин:2012, 17
59 ibid
60 ibid
61 “…до начала перестройки застывшие формы визуальных идеологических репрезентаций - транспаранты с политическими лозунгами, агитационные стенды, портреты партийного руководства страны - не воспринимались большинством советских граждан буквально...[э]ти лозунги пешеходам были 'невидимы'...” (Юрчак:2016, 575)
62 In the English edition of the book, Yurchak calls these “deterritorialized milieus” (Yurchak, 2010). However, the Russian word, directly (albeit awkwardly) translated, means something like “places of existing beyond/out of.” Additionally, in the Russian edition, Yurchak distinguishes between deterritorialization and places of vnenahodimost – a distinction that is absent in the English equivalent. For these and other reasons, I stick to the Russian term.
63 “Нормальный” советский человек не является ни активистом, ни диссидентом. Он участвует в формировании и воспроизводстве официального идеологического дискурса - он делает это в основном на уровне формы высказываний, одновременно наделяя их новыми, неожиданными смыслами. В результате такого отношения к высказываниям и ритуалам советской системы “нормальный человек” создает новые пространства свободного действия, которые официальный дискурс системы не в состоянии описать и которых система не ожидает, поскольку они не совпадают с её дискурсом, ну и не находится в оппозиции к нему. Как показано в книге, это особое пространства свободы - автор называет их пространствами внаходимости - могут появляться в самых
In other words, places of *vnenahodimost* are spaces that exist outside of or along with the official or everyday discourse, but are not in opposition to it. Yurchak explains that, along with the performative shift, “[t]he system...was subjected to a constant process of internal deterritorialization, mutating towards new multiple forms of ‘normal life’ and enriched with new meanings and opportunities that the state could not foresee and control. At the heart of this process lay not a direct opposition to the system, but its gradual creative modification by the subjects that were its part.”

To arrive at an understanding of *vnenahodimost*, Yurchak builds on the concept from Mikhail Bakhtin, who originally introduced the term in *Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (1986) to describe the relationship between the author and the main character of a literary work. A place of *vnenahodimost* is akin to another term, namely Michel Foucault’s heterotopia. Yurchak himself also observes the connection between his deterritorialization and Foucault’s definition. According to Foucault, heterotopias are elusive spaces of otherness “that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of everyday space.” Foucault wrote, “in the mirror, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent.” Along with mirrors, Foucault named prisons and theaters as examples of heterotopias – spaces where everyday reality does not apply.

Scholars of Czech history Heczková and Svatoňová refer to a somewhat analogous set of phenomena as *strange places*. Strange places can be treated as synonyms for places of *vnenahodimost* or heterotopias. If we continue the analogy, we can observe that Yurchak’s deterritorialization and *vnenahodimost* also correspond to the Czech concept of the *gray zone*. Svetlana Boym mentions the term in her discussion of the nostalgic representation of Central Europe. Boym points out that in the context of socialist Czechoslovakia, “... Havel and the philosopher Patočka advocated a ‘parallel structure’ and gray zones of antipolitical existence, living the truth within the system.” Boym further compares these gray zones to “... Herbert Marcuse’s 1960s project of creating ‘repression-free zones’ within a bourgeois society, which would represent an alternative countercultural public sphere.” Johnathan Bolton provides some evidence of how such zones were formed in Czechoslovakia. He identifies the post-1968 wave of professional purges, which began with the party ranks and moved on to various professional organizations, as one of the key contributing factors to the first appearances of the gray zone. Large numbers of Czechoslovak communists across the country were dismissed from the Party and from their jobs, frequently on mere suspicion of supporting Dubček’s liberal reforms known as the Prague Spring. The purges were one of the measures taken by the hardliner core against Dubček’s allies. The step hit cultural institutions hard and targeted schools, universities, media outlets,

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разных контекстах - в кочегарке и кабинете комитета комсомола, в квартире друзей и лаборатории учёных-физиков. (Беляев, Юрчак:2016, 16)
64“Система позднего социализма подвергалась постоянному процессу внутренней детерриториализации, мутируя в сторону новых множественных форм "нормальной жизни" и обогащаясь новыми смыслами и возможностями, предвидеть и контролировать которые государство не могло. В основе этого процесса лежала не прямая оппозиция системе, а ее постепенное творческое видоизменение субъектами, которые являлись ее частью.” (Юрчак:2016, 248)
65Автор и герой в эстетической деятельности (1986)
66Юрчак: 2016, 267
67 Ibid
68Dehaene and De Cauter:2008, 4
69Dehaene and De Cauter:2008, 17
70Vaněk, Just, Bolton
71Boym:2001, 228
72Ibid
73Estimated 500,000 people in Vaněk:2009

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publishing houses, and various cultural and arts organizations. Bolton writes, “[i]f we are to understand the underbrush from which dissent grew, we have to devote some time to considering the overall result of the purges.”

The immediate result was a large number of educated, highly skilled and unemployed urban dwellers who had no prospects of re-entering their field, since they now had a record of being politically undesirable. However, unemployment was criminalized in Czechoslovakia from 1957, when the government passed a law against parasitism, meaning that citizens who were unable to secure work were committing a criminal offense punishable by up to three years in prison. This meant that finding and, just as importantly, retaining employment became not only a financial, but a legal necessity. The solution frequently lay in securing a job that required unskilled or physical labor, such as cleaning or driving a taxi. One of the most popular positions for disgraced intellectuals was that of a stocker in the boiler room of a large building. The job required intermittently stocking up the boiler to keep up an even supply of heat. The long intervals between stocking were then devoted to the employee’s personal interests. Bolton notes, “[i]n boiler rooms, often one PhD took over another.” Indeed, Yurchak provides the example of the Soviet boiler room as a place of vnenahodimost par excellence. Yurchak illustrates this point by describing how certain boiler rooms formed small academic communities where new potential employees were admitted based on whether their academic profile fit within the group. A Czechoslovak example of similar activity could be František Stárek, mostly known for his active involvement in the Czech Underground music movement; he used his time as a night stoker to print first issues of the samizdat magazine *Window (Vokno)*. In this way, government decisions regarding an entire layer of the population contributed to creating a deterritorialized environment within the dominant system. Bolton writes, “[t]his relocation of intellectuals to manual labor was, in the 70s and 80s, one of the defining characteristics of Czech intellectual life and created a ‘shadow world,’ an alternative universe that existed beyond the official sphere ... For many, this created a strange sense of doubling.”

The professional situation was not the only one in which new and unexpected meanings and adaptation strategies arose. Yurchak provides an example of the conflicting governmental attitude towards Western cultural imports; however, we can make a similar point about material goods. On the one hand, the official stance towards Western imports, such as jeans or Coca-Cola, was derogatory. On the other hand, the system seemed to admit that capitalist products were of better quality and to condone their desirability in the eyes of the population. For instance, in 1960, Czechoslovakia introduced a soft drink called *Kofola*. This drink, which is a carbonated, sweet, dark liquid with caffeine, was intended to replace Coca-Cola and Pepsi. A product such as Kofola, which remains popular today, can be interpreted as an admission that a Western drink is delicious and worth emulating. At the same time, real Coca-Cola and other Western goods could be purchased in Czechoslovakia. Starting from 1957, the government set up a chain of exclusive stores carrying these goods, elevating them as prestigious and coveted items. The stores were called Tuzex. When a citizen made money outside of Czechoslovakia, the foreign currency was to be transferred to the state. The state, after having deducted a portion of the money, would give the citizen bony – pseudo-monetary units that could only be used at the Tuzex where one could buy western-made goods (the aforementioned Coca-Cola, for instance).

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74Bolton:2015, 91
75Bolton: 2015, 124
76Bolton: 2015, 128
77Юрчак:2016, 304
78A deliberate misspelling of the word “okno” reflecting the word is colloquially pronounced
79Author's interview, Fall 2013
80Bolton:2015, 128
81*Tuzemský Export*
The products available at Tuzex were examples of generally unavailable luxuries, and a black market of bony consequently grew around the enterprise. This trade, though illegal, was generally tolerated – not least because the socialist economy of shortage produced a wide number of similar creative behaviors and social contracts. Although Czechoslovakia was a well-to-do country compared to Poland and wealthy compared to the Soviet republics, desired items had to be “gotten” in much the same way across the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. Lines were notorious in Poland as well, perhaps even more so since Poland had suffered a prolonged economic crisis that was much deeper than that of the Czechs.  

Utekhin describes and analyzes a similar situation in later Soviet decades in Russia:

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\text{In the conditions of shortage of goods and services, information on where to buy (or “get”) a particular product played no less important [a] role than money. The opportunity to “get” involved [in] the exploitation of acquaintances, rather than an anonymous buyer-seller relationship in the store. Such acquaintances, which could be used to buy tights, good meat or boots; to “arrange” for a child to go to a good school; get a good job or get an appointment with a good doctor, are called “blat.” “Good” in this context automatically means “not available to everyone.”}
\]

Access to “blat” created a kind of social capital of individual citizens. Almost everyone had something to share with others: the teacher, for example, could not get the “deficit,” but could find a tutor for the child of someone who had access to the “deficit.” In this way, potentially bilateral relations were created, presupposing the principle of reciprocity. If you cannot do or “get” anything “useful” and not available to you, then you could rely on such tools of gratitude as a box of sweets or a bottle of cognac.  

The examples of self-made economy and the government’s contradictory approach to foreign goods (labeling them as simultaneously suspicious and prestigious) further illustrate the deterritorialized environment that allowed for pockets of uncertainty or openness of interpretation in which places of vnenahodimost flourished.

To recap, then, deterritorialization enabled the creation of spaces of vnenahodimost. These spaces, akin to heterotopias and strange places, which will be explored in the upcoming two chapters, were symptomatic of the multilayered and complex nature of socialist societies. In line with Yurchak’s argument, contradictory attitudes from the government, combined with the creation of a gray zone (double lives), enabled certain pockets of privacy that did not go against the system but did not belong to it either – they were existing out of. The remainder of this chapter traces changes in spatial  

82or, as Czechs call it, the “self-help economy” - ekonomika svépomoci  
83Here is an example to illustrate the economic disparity between the countries of the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Republics. The late 80's in Western Soviet Ukraine (i.e. Lviv) saw a practise for higher-level management of large firms or government organizations to book 'holiday tours' to Poland. The real intention behind these tours was to purchase and smuggle back into the country hard-to-find goods such as nylon stockings or instant coffee. Yurchak refers to similar practices regarding the smuggling of fashionable clothes or Western records to Soviet post cities (Yurchak:2016, Chapter 5). This point illustrates the fact that, however difficult the economic situation in Warsaw or Prague, they were still seen as economically “western” from the Soviet point of view.  
84“В условиях дефицита товаров и услуг не меньшую роль, чем деньги, играла информация о том, где можно купить (или «достать») тот или иной товар. Возможность достать предполагала эксплуатацию знакомств, а не анонимных отношений «покупатель - продавец» в магазине. Такие знакомства, которыми можно воспользоваться, чтобы купить дефицитные колготки, хорошее мясо или сапоги или же чтобы «устроить» ребенка в хорошую школу, устроиться самому на хорошую работу или попасть на прием к хорошему врачу, называются «блатом». «Хорошее» автоматически значит «доступное не для всех».

Доступ к блатам создавал своеобразный социальный капитал человека. Почти у каждого оказывалось чем поделиться с другими: учитель, например, не мог достать «дефицит», но мог найти репетитора ребенку того, кто имел доступ к «дефициту». Таким образом создавались потенциально двусторонние связи, предполагающие принцип взаимности. Если же ничего «полезного» и не общедоступного ты сделать или «достать» не можешь, то в качестве ответного жеста годятся такие инструменты благодарности, как коробка конфет или бутылка коньяка.” (Утехин:2012, 4)
perception on many levels that I propose contributed to the appearance of \textit{vnenahodimost}. More specifically, I discuss the horizontality of the post-war years, the verticality of Stalinism, the fluidity of the Thaw and arrive at theatricality of the later Soviet decades.

\textbf{1.2 Sovietization}

In order to get a better grip on the concepts I discussed above (and will continue to rely on for the remainder of this study), it is useful to have a grasp of certain historical processes, especially the link between history of the USSR and that of the Eastern Bloc. For instance, it is important to understand that, although Stalinism in the Soviet Union predated World War II, this was not the case in Poland or former Czechoslovakia. This is because Joseph Stalin had a leading role in the Soviet government from 1922,\textsuperscript{85} while Poland and Czechoslovakia officially became socialist republics in 1947 and 1948, respectively. For this reason, I can distinguish a very brief post-war period in both countries, which was followed by a stalinist period. In addition, the subsequent establishment of Soviet-style government and installation of Soviet values happened at a different pace and in different ways in each region. This process is referred to as “sovietization” and it is, in no small part, why today I am able to apply Yurchak’s theoretical concepts to an analysis of places other than Soviet Russia.

This section supplies a general historical background with the intent to illustrate the mechanisms of sovietization in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is an overview intended for readers who do not specialize in the history of the Soviet Union or the Eastern Bloc, although some familiarity with the regions is assumed.

\textbf{After the War}

\textit{To understand the course of events in Eastern and Central Europe during the first post-war years, it must be realized that the pre-war social conditions called to extensive reforms. It must further be understood that Nazi rule had occasioned a profound disintegration of the existing order of things. In these circumstances, the only hope was to set up a social order which would be new ... so what was planned in Moscow as a stage on the road to servitude was willingly accepted in the countries concerned as though it were true progress.} – Czesław Milosz\textsuperscript{86}

The experience of the war, much like the experience of communism, differed for Poland and Czechoslovakia, yet historical accounts of the war’s aftermath carry a series of similar characteristics. For this reason, this section focuses on cross-regional resemblances, rather than separate histories. To begin, I examine the specifically postwar sense of spatial orientation, which can be compared to a state normally associated with intoxication: disorientation, disorder, a sense of unreality and a lack of direction. Additionally, I examine how the period was marked by movement – both horizontal, of large populations across vast swaths of land, and vertical, in rebuilding cities destroyed by the war. Politically, the chaos created a sort of vacuum, which various powers from the West (governments in exile) and the East (the Soviet Union) struggled to fill. Moreover, there was a push and pull from

\textsuperscript{85}Stalin held the post of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death in 1953
\textsuperscript{86}Dabrowski:2014, 425
within the regions (local communists) and from the outside (mostly the Soviet Union).87 The understanding of this disorientation and the movement is important for my study because they form a foundation for later developments.

The establishment of communist power after the war in both countries capitalized heavily on the displacement – both physical and psychological – of the postwar years. In former Czechoslovakia, as historian Jiří Kocian, in his essay *Czechoslovakia Between Two Totalitarian Systems* (2014), observes, “[m]any citizens’ political consciousness had undergone a shift to the left and towards socialism (no matter how different their respective notions of socialism were).”88 This social shift, accompanied by a “euphoria” lasting several months, was partly a consequence of the generally positive public view of the Soviet Union. Cashing in on the success of the Prague uprising and expulsion of Nazis, the Soviet Army presented itself as the liberator – a sentiment shared by the public that was simultaneously spontaneous (Fig.1.1) and staged (Fig.1.2-1.3). The Communists rode the wave of this positive mood (and the continuing perception of Germany as a possible threat) to introduce a series of changes that set the stage for what was soon to follow. Symptomatic of the disorientation of the time, these “new economic and political developments enjoyed a widespread, enthusiastic support, yet there were also voices of concern and doubts about what such changes might bring about.”89 For example, as one of my interviewees exclaimed, “[e]nd of the war! Who knows what went on – they [Soviet army] were liberating us on one end [Prague] and pillaging us in another [Moravia].”90 Along with the sentimental friendliness diluted with ambivalence towards the USSR, the postwar economic crisis did much to dull any sober political ruminations.91 Therefore, among many other political factors not discussed here, the electrified mood of the postwar months, combined with the positive view of the USSR and critical economic conditions, paved the way for what was legally in progress92 since before the war – the entrance of Czechoslovakia into the Soviet sphere of influence. One way or another, by 1947, it seemed to make sense to everyone that “the country’s foreign policy must be rooted in an alliance with the USSR.”93 The stage was set for the Communist takeover, which between February 17 - 25, 1948 officially transformed the country into a Socialist Republic.

All the while, Poland was struggling with the drawn-out consequences of the war. The months and years following the official end of the war were anything but straightforward for Polish citizens. Social structures were considerably altered94 and “…diplomatic negotiations concerning the country’s future possessed an air of distinct unreality.”95 Indeed, both the future and the role of the Soviet Union in it were uncertain. Babiracki confirms that “[a]mid the contrasts and contradictions of the immediate postwar years, most Poles could only guess what the future would bring them …” and “[t]he exact nature of Soviet involvement in Poland’s culture likewise seemed unclear after the war.”96 Since the virtual destruction of the Polish intelligentsia, the Jews and other national minorities, “political,
cultural, and economic life could never be the same.” Davies echoes Dabrowski and many others when he writes that “... when Poland reopened for business in 1944 to 1945, under communist auspices, it was not merely the regime that was new. It was a new Poland.”

The postwar period in both Poland and Czechoslovakia was further characterized by large-scale human movement – both voluntary and involuntary. The years 1945 to 1947 were turbulent and mobile not only because of the misplacement left over from the war, but also as a result of resettlement programs, which affected millions of people. Davies calls the situation in Poland “[o]ne of the greatest demographic upheavals in European history” and notes that “[o]nly a small proportion of the population inhabited the places where they had lived before the war. Most of the towns and the entire Western Territories had to be repopulated by refugees or families transferred from the Soviet Union. In all those localities where uprooted newcomers outnumbered indigenous inhabitants, former social traditions survived with difficulty.” Additionally, Dabrowski writes that “Poles tended to be discriminated against,” and large numbers of them deported “deeper into the Soviet Union” and had their property confiscated. Similarly to the premature and ill-advised removal of Germans from the former Czechoslovakia, the Polish Militia began rounding up and killing the Polish German minority long before an official program for expulsion was organized. Czechoslovakia was struggling to fill the void left along the border by the exterminated or deported Sudeten Germans. In terms of movement, then, “[t]he changes brought about by the War were deep and permanent. Seven years of slaughter refashioned the state, nation, and society more radically than a century of endeavor beforehand or three decades of communist rule afterward.”

Space was also shifting on a large scale as borders were redrawn. The Yalta pact altered the size and shape of Poland, transferring the Western part to the country from Germany and the Soviet Union annexing the Eastern part. In a similar vein of geographic alterations, the Czechoslovak communists, “[i]n an effort to undermine the existing relationship between the citizen and the state and dispel traditions as much as possible in favor of the emerging ‘people’s democracy’ or ‘socialist’ society, ... wasted no time and, in early 1949, abolished the provincial system that has been in use for a millennium. The existing historical provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, to which Slovakia had been added in 1918, were replaced by a system of regions. They, nonetheless, proved so inefficient that before long the CPCz found it necessary to reorganize them and reduce their number.” These redrawing of maps and shifting of populations are important for my later discussion of inscape, or an internal landscape, as defined by the Czech geologist and philosopher Václav Cílek. According to Cílek, an inscape represents an important element of human identity and is closely tied to its surrounding environment. Considering this close connection, we can appreciate the depth and breadth of personal, internal shifts caused by the flux of the postwar years. For instance, Dabrowski adds that “[t]he Poland that was re-created after World War II was a far cry from what it had been before the war. Both frontiers and populations had shifted. The expulsion of Germans as well as the annihilation of the overwhelming majority of Poland’s Jews rendered the country more ethnically homogenous – more ethnically Polish. The death of so many members of the prewar intelligentsia rendered Poland even more peasant in nature. The moniker of the new entity, the Polish People’s Republic (PRL), or simply People’s Poland, was indeed more apt.” That is to say, postwar changes permanently altered
external cultural environments and with that, affected much deeper layers of non-narrative identities (which I defined in some detail in the Introduction).

On the other, contradictory, hand, the war was over, and despite the turbulent aftermath, there was no denying that some things were changing for the better. As Davies points out, “[a]ny sympathetic description must surely match Poland’s atrophied political development against the advances in social and cultural life and the real achievements of reconstruction from the ruins of the War.”

Furthermore, as Patryk Babiracki points out, “[i]t was mesmerizing to watch Poland’s return to life.” For instance, the following is a description of Lublin, the seat of Soviet government in Poland, in the fall 1944: “The daily press came out regularly, cinemas and theatres opened up, as did several restaurants and cafes. The postal service resumed its work and issued its first stamps …” Intense reconstruction was underway in Warsaw. Public services, such as the post, were being restored everywhere; for example, the first tram ran its route in Warsaw. Contradiction and paradox – positive along with the negative – are fundamental to a nuanced and more realistic understanding of how the soviet system (discussed later in this chapter) was established not only in the USSR, but also across the Eastern Bloc.

To conclude, I can broadly define the postwar years as spatially disorienting, mobile, unreal and contradictory. In both Poland and Czechoslovakia, the postwar chaos welcomed the establishment of a strong Soviet influence. However, initially, communism in both countries was not necessarily perceived as an evil, but as a fresh wind of change. At the same time, the Polish attitude to specifically Soviet-style communism and Soviet power was markedly different from Czechoslovak attitude, mostly thanks to the wartime Soviet occupation of Poland. Either way, much like in Prague, any optimism or hopes that Warsaw pinned on communism abated as Stalin continued to extend his program to the newly acquired additions to his empire. Overall, we can observe a somewhat similar postwar scenario (in relation to Soviet power) in both regions – a government in exile, contested by a group of communists that spent the war in the Soviet Union, preparing for this moment; an initial show of democracy (Dabrowski notes, “[i]n these early years, the communists were careful to phase themselves in to power; thus at the outset they did countenance some political pluralism”); the return of exiled government; and, where the Czechs saw a coup d’état, a subsequent falsified referendum and “democratic” elections for the Poles. In the empty spaces left by the ruined and disintegrated buildings and systems, new ones sprung up; in addition, a new direction was established, and new borders delineated space. Although the materials I cover in the empirical chapters are historically situated much later than the postwar months and years, all of the artists I discuss either had direct experience of the war or were born in its aftermath. Moreover, the events of 1945–1948, large and small, laid a foundation for what was to follow.

Stalinism
As I mentioned earlier, sovietization was a process by which countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia adopted a Soviet model of doing things. Dabrowski explains that what was sought at the time was a type of “postwar Soviet uniformity” where “[e]ach country in the East bloc was to become a miniature USSR, with collectivized agriculture, heavy industry, communal housing, even miniature Stalins.” Babiracki confirms that “[t]he years 1948–1953 in Poland witnessed creeping Sovietization.”

However, he pauses to ponder what Sovietization actually means and arrives at the conclusion that it is

105Davies:2005, 413
106Babiracki:2015, 52
107ibid
108Dabrowski:2014, 426
109Dabrowski:2014, 428
110Babiracki:2015, 155
a many-faceted term, which, “on one level, ... comprises an array of negotiated micro- and macro-processes whereby East European cultures and institutions evolved into Soviet-like instruments of communist party-states.” This section is devoted to the micro-processes, which, for my purposes, I take to mean “everyday life” and imperceptible cultural alterations. In this way, we go back to Gilles Deleuze and his micro-becomings, to discuss how urban space, fashion and language were used as tools in the Sovietization of Czechoslovakia and Poland just as much as the more historically prominent coercion tactics of mass arrests and labor camps.

The understanding of micro-becomings in specifically Stalinist Czechoslovakia and Poland is important to this study despite the fact that my upcoming chapters concern a later period. This understanding is necessary because, according to Yurchak’s line of thinking, it would be impossible to explain the paradoxes underlying later decades without due discussion of the Stalinist period. An analysis of how spatial practices and the everyday were affected by Stalinist policies is especially relevant to me. Again, however, it is essential to explain the way in which Stalinism, like all Soviet exports, was nuanced across Czechoslovakia and Poland.

By the time Stalinism took hold in Prague and Warsaw, it was a well-established system in the Soviet Union, with its own definable style and characteristics. Cultural historian Natalia Lebina observes the following:

*By the early 1950s, Stalinism had acquired features of imperial monumentality. In the cultural, aesthetic and ethical spaces, the formation of a large style was completed, in the context of which the process of creating a comprehensive, all-embracing household simulacra took place, the material was replaced by the symbolic.*

This period really arrived in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the late 1940s to 1950s (although not at the exact same time; Prague was always somewhat delayed). This means that the features of Stalinism as it appeared in both countries already contain the above-mentioned monumentality and, crucially for this study, have a well-established method of taking over everyday life. The effect of this transformation and normalization of the everyday was dramatic and, in practice, according to Lebina, “... took the form of direct interference in the private space. In conditions of Stalinism, the regulation of cultural behavior of the population, its leisure practices, reached its apogee.”

The development of a grand, distinctly Stalinist style of architecture is one example of the system’s interference in the everyday. Urban spaces and their relationship to human identity are of particular interest to me, so this feature of Stalinist years, which influenced how cities looked and felt, is important to explain here. As Davies observes of Stalinist Polish art, “[a] specific form of megalomania

111ibid
112At the same time, Babiracki points out that the term itself “has been turned into something of a heuristic tool, an illusively stable category of analysis. Infused with assumptions about what constitutes 'Soviet' and 'East European' and inviting active interest in exploring the tragic fate of the culturally Western lands behind the 'iron curtain', Sovietization exemplifies what Michel Foucault has called 'the positive unconscious' operative in the production of knowledge more generally, 'a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse.'” (ibid)
113See earlier in this study, Introduction, section “Non-narrative Identity”
114“К началу 1950-х годов сталинизм обрел черты имперской монументальности. В культурно-эстетическом и этическом пространствах завершилось формирование большого стиля, в контексте которого происходил и процесс создания некоего всеобъемлющего бытового симулякра, материалное заменялось символическим.” (Лебина:2015, 418)
115“...в данном случае нормирование повседневности принимало характер прямого вмешательства в пространство приватности. В условиях сталинизма достигла апогея регламентация культурного поведения населения, его досуговых практик.” (Лебина:2015, 419)

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took hold. All the public works of the day had to be colossal. Bigger was thought to mean better.”

Buildings in this style, often compared to fancy layered cakes, were erected in large cities across the USSR and given as “gifts” to satellite capitals. For example, Warsaw’s Palace of Culture and Science, placed directly in the city center, was a copy of similar buildings in Moscow and other cities and, as Babiracki comments, “… symbolized an unequivocal Soviet intrusion and the Polish communists’ overt commitment to the Stalinist reorganization of space.”

A strikingly similar, albeit smaller, version of the skyscraper can still be found in Prague’s Dejvice quarter where it now serves, in an ironic reminder of changing times, as an American luxury hotel. While a cake-like skyscraper would have been impossible in the center of Prague given its cramped medieval streets, the city saw its own symbol of Stalinist grandeur – the world’s largest statue of Stalin overlooking the city from Letná hill. As with the Warsaw palace – and elsewhere – these spatial intrusions served as persistent reminders in the everyday comings and goings of the city’s inhabitants. Prague’s Stalin, just like postwar Warsaw’s Palace, could be seen from almost anywhere in the city, even from the window of one’s home, and the statue formed a silent ideological background to absolutely all activities, public or private. These monuments, which remained intact well beyond Stalin’s death (most of the buildings are intact today, and the Prague statue was erected after Stalin died and removed only in 1962), “… reminded all passersby that the momentum of Stalinism had outlived its prime mover by at least two years.”

Along with transforming urban space, Stalinism invaded everyday practices in other ways. According to Lebina, the style of the period, from food to clothes to interior decorating, favored the massive, the heavy and the opulent. Fur coats, caviar, mayonnaise, heavy wood furniture and velvet curtains were signs of good taste, not to mention that these items were hardly available to the average citizen. The ficus – a large, tree-like indoor plant – was enjoying the height of popularity, as were large fabric lampshades, which early communists previously dismissed as tacky. This heavy-handed grandeur can be interpreted as an attempt to balance the unsettled mood of the postwar years. Meanwhile, these decidedly non-socialist, bourgeois tendencies were contrasted with the clean-cut optimism and working-class focus of official art. Norman Davies writes, “[i]n art, Socialist Realism gained exclusive approval, with novels about tractor drivers, and paintings about concrete factories.”

In this way, Stalinism on the everyday level represented a paradoxical mixture of the grandiose and the plain. Here, we can see a certain double-ness, where everyday tastes do not support the officially propagated fashion, yet both the everyday and the official are demonstrated by the dominant system.

In addition, Soviet linguistic adjustments were made in both Czech and Polish. For examples, Davies writes, “A[n] attempt was made to modify the Polish language by introducing the Russian habit of speaking in the second person plural, per Wy in place of the standard Polish third person singular, per Pan or Pani.”

The equivalent of this in Czech was the broad introduction of the words “soudruh” and “soudružka,” meaning “comrade” (male and female respectively) – a term of address commonly used in the Soviet Union.

As I mentioned earlier, the economic crisis – so prolonged that it became the everyday norm – directly affected aspects of existence closely connected to how people viewed themselves and built their reality.

116Davies:2001, 7
117Babiracki:2015, 3
118Letná is one of the highest and central points in Prague and the makers of the monument ensured that their creation could be seen from virtually any spot in the city.
119Babiracki:2015, 4
120Davies:2001, 7 – 8
121ibid
122In Russian, the male noun “товарищ” was used to address both men and women. At times, this produced a comical effect, such as “товарищ женщина!”

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Perhaps the most relevant of these aspects, in the framework of this study, are the relationship to
everyday goods and objects (a do-it-yourself mentality) and the allocation of free time. These changes,
resulting from economic alterations, worked closely with two other aspects of society, namely
geography and collective memory / national mythology, which the Party decisively redrew and which
irrevocably altered not only the national sense of identity, but also the many individual selves being
conceived and developed all across the land.

Overall, “[t]he period of Stalinism (1948–1953) had its own peculiarities and its own raison d’être: to
create states in the likeness and image of the USSR.”123 In view of this, it is appropriate to examine
Poland and Czechoslovakia as two comparative attempts at this “uniformization.” On a schematic
level, this meant the organization of a police state, centralization of the economy, and the complete and
total submission of all cultural and educational organizations. In addition, one of the key characteristics
of this period was the prevailing importance assigned to the Communist Party – the PZPR and the
KSCM in Poland and Czechoslovakia respectively. Dabrowski notes that “... the Party’s general
secretary carried more weight that any head of state. Organized vertically, the Party hierarchy created a
so-called nomenklatura or list of party functionaries. Where one stood on the list determined what jobs
one might fill and what privileges one might have. Both the Party’s leading role and the leading role of
the Soviet Union were given. ‘Nationalist deviations’ from the Soviet model were not permissible.”124

Although my the case studies (Ch.2 and Ch.3) are not directly concerned with the Stalinist period, the
everyday lives of the artists whose work is analyzed in this thesis were heavily shaped by Stalinist
policies. In addition, Yurchak’s concepts, such as deterritorialization, cannot be fully explained without
a Stalinist context.

**After Stalin**

The epoch of Stalinism ended with an uncannily timed string of deaths of Stalinist leaders (including
Stalin himself). Stalin died on March 5, 1953, swiftly followed by Klement Gottwald, Stalinist leader
of Czechoslovakia, on March 14 of the same year; the latter died shortly after having returned from
the funeral of the former. In Poland, Stalinist hardliner Bolesław Bierut died on March 12, 1956 – merely
two weeks after Khrushchev’s speech I address below (although he left office earlier, towards the end
of 1952). Previously jailed Gomułka returned to govern Poland. After a brief struggle, Nikita
Khrushchev assumed power in the Soviet Union, launching a process that we now refer to as de-
stalinization across the republic and setting the tone for the coming decades. Pivotal in this launch is
Khrushchev’s report, “On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences,” renouncing the Stalinist “cult
of personality,” which he delivered to the astounded 20th Congress of the Communist Party on February
25, 1956. Among others, the assembly was attended by Mikhail Gorbachev and the future reformer of
Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček.

While this string of changes, known as the Thaw125, is described in more or less fluid terms when it
comes to Soviet history126, it appears to be fragmented in the Soviet satellites. For example, the
previously mentioned infamous statue of Stalin in Prague was not erected until 1955, and it remained in
place well after 1956 – in fact, the Czechs plucked up the courage to destroy the mammoth statue of the
dictator only as late as 1962, and even then, it was done with utmost caution: the head of the statue was
removed first, so nobody could accuse the city of blowing up Stalin himself, and the body was

123Dabrowski:2014, 428
124Dabrowski:2014, 428
125Оттепель (Rus.)
dynamited at night (although some safety concerns were at play here).127 This caution and delayed
reaction to the changes in the Soviet Union could be attributed to the fact that Stalinist hardliner
Antonín Novotný, taking over from Gottwald, remained in charge of the party (and then the state,
taking on the presidential seat in addition to the secretarial one) until swelling popular dissatisfaction
unseated him in 1968, allowing Dubček a brief moment in the spotlight. Dubček introduced liberal
reforms, and his arrival meant that the Thaw reached Czechoslovakia, even if over a decade after
Stalin’s death.

Opinions diverge as to when the Thaw took place in Poland, with Dabrowski writing that “no ‘thaw’
ocurred”128 after Stalin’s death in 1953 and that the effect was felt only after Khrushchev’s 1956
speech. As I already mentioned, Bolesław Bierut, who ran Poland under Stalinism, died just two weeks
after hearing this speech in Moscow. According to Davies, however, and, to a certain extent Babiracki,
Polish enthusiasm (if we can call it that) for Stalinist reality was losing steam by the time the dictator
died in 1953. Davies supports this by the offering the following: “In December 1954, the hated
Ministry of Security (though not, of course, the Security Office) was abolished. In 1955 also, the
censorship relaxed sufficiently to permit the first veiled hints of criticism. Gomułka was surreptitiously
released from detention. Collectivization was quietly abandoned.”129 Davies then concludes that
“[w]hen Khrushchev launched his attack on Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the CPU in February
1956, the Thaw in Poland was already swelling into a flood.”130

Indeed, according to Babiracki, “… for those same Polish passersby, enough had changed in the
country’s political life by 1955 to mitigate even the ominous presence of Stalin’s ghost. Surely, that life
continued to be defined by Poland’s close relationship with the USSR. But paradoxically, as a result of
pressure from Moscow and domestic social and political ferment, daily life was becoming noticeably
different.”131 These differences concerned not only a new economic policy and the restructuring of the
security apparatus, but also a slight relaxation in censorship. Babiracki illustrates these changes by
citing two relatively controversial theatre productions from 1955, namely Stanisław Wyspiański’s The
Wedding (1900) and Adam Mickiewicz’s Forefathers’ Eve (1860). Both are important prewar Polish
works – the former is “… a veiled critique of contemporary Polish society ... deemed too passive to
struggle for its own independence,” and the latter is staged with “[a]nti-Russian overtones,” where “... the
Russian tsar and his officials, cavorting against the architectural landscape on which the new Soviet
embassy was modeled, are unmistakably in the service of the devil himself.”132 Such productions would
be unthinkable in Prague in the same years, despite the fact that this city, along with Brno and
Bratislava, received a visit from Théâtre National in Paris; popular Czechoslovak shows visited France;
and the year saw several productions of Western classics by Ibsen, Moliere and Brecht.133

This study coincides with Gomułka’s Thaw in Poland and a more tumultuous Novotný-Dubček-Husák
period in Czechoslovakia. Allowed back to power after Stalin’s death, Gomułka was working hard to
negotiate the newly adjusted Polish-Soviet power balance. “As a result of his understanding with the
Soviets – sealed during his visit to Moscow in November 1956 – Gomułka was empowered to make a
series of strategic concessions to popular demands and to permit the three specific features of the Polish
order – an independent Catholic Church, a free peasantry, and a curious brand of bogus politics

127A Prague urban legend has it that the head is still to be found somewhere in the city.
128Dabrowski:2005, 431
129Davies:2001, 8
130ibid
131Babiracki:2015, 4
132ibid
133Just:2010, 262

31
Meanwhile, in Prague, Dubček’s reforms did not sit well with a military-minded Brezhnev, who replaced Khrushchev in 1964 and was cultivating his own brand of cult of personality. The Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Dubček was replaced by Gustáv Husák, who remained on schoolroom posters across the country until 1987. Dubček generally stands for what is widely known as the Prague Spring, whereas Husák is invariably associated with the period of Normalization – the time where the Czech cases of this study are situated.

1.3 Soviet Imaginary Worlds

In his work on deterritorialization/vnenahodimost, Yurchak discusses the many imaginary worlds that appeared in the Soviet Union from the 1960's onward. He writes that “the presence in the soviet everyday of other worlds manifested...as a colossal and rapid growth of interest in facts, knowledge and activities that created a sense of distancing from everyday reality.”135 These interests and activities, which included anything from a study of foreign languages to astronomy, created spaces that, according to Yurchak, existed in a relationship of vnenahodimost to the “ideological discourse of the system.”136 These spaces came together to form a single, large space – what Yurchak calls the “soviet imaginary world.”137 This imaginary world can be perhaps linked to Julianne Fürst's use of dropping out in the Soviet context. Fürst relies on this notion to examine marginalized cultural phenomena, such as Yogi's, within Soviet culture. To Fürst, dropping out is a “spatial separation”, which necessarily includes a consideration of borders because “[o]nly the negotiation of borders makes it possible to cross them.” By this she means that, in order to drop out of something, one must first recognize the 'something' as real – what Fürst calls “an acceptance of a normative definition imposed from the 'other side'.” Here, she discovers a catch, because while dropping out meant going beyond the border, frequently the process was reversed – i.e. the border would be constructed in response to apparently inappropriate behavior. This leads Fürst to conclude that it is possible to interpret dropping out as “a collaboration between those who wish to leave the mainstream and the mainstream itself.” In relation to Yurchak's imaginary soviet, this would mean that the deterritorialized realm existed in tandem with another, counterpart type of soviet world. Here, however, one encounters a conundrum because it is not immediately apparent what such a counterpart would be: is it some type of 'real' soviet in contract to the 'imaginary'?

Upon closer examination, it is possible to notice that the marginalized or deterritorialized spaces of Yurchak's Soviet imaginary co-existed not (or not only) alongside a real soviet space, but rather a different, yet just as imaginary Soviet Union. While the deterritorialized spaces drew on the unfamiliar to construct their reality, this Soviet Union was to be found in the sunny fields of social realist paintings, literature and especially theatre, which the soviet system actively supported, controlled and promoted.142 While the remainder of this study is devoted to imaginary worlds within the context of deterritorialization, this section is devoted to the process of constructing its counterpart: what I call the officially imagined soviet and how it unwittingly contributed to the appearance of vnenahodimost within socialist cultures.

134 Davies:2001, 10
135 Yurchak:2016, 314 – 315
136 ibid
137 ibid
138 Fürst:2016, 4
139 Fürst:2016, 5
140 ibid
141 ibid

32
Politization of Theatre and the “Paradox of Censorship”

Yurchak explains that one of the most important conditions for the creation of vnena hodimost is a paradoxical socialist tendency to limit certain cultural influences in an apparently clear-cut manner, which, in reality, was ambiguous and vague. Yurchak supports this observation by examining the case of conflicting official attitudes towards Western music, for instance jazz. During the later decades of the Soviet Union, jazz was alternatively praised as being the music of the downtrodden workers of America and derided as a symbol of the capitalist bourgeoisie. Yurchak explains that such ambivalence left room for interpretation and double meanings in culture as a whole.

Similar cases of ideological ambiguity can be observed in the Normalization era in Czechoslovakia. Prior to Normalization, in the 1950s, Czech theatre entered into “... deep systematic dependence on politics and ideology. Whether the company or artist accepted or denied this ideology, they still entered into dialogue with it and had no escape.” According to Just, this involvement, or politicization of theatre, stood on a three-pronged approach: the centralization of all theatres, the re-thinking of so-called “cultural heritage” with the resulting limitation of dramaturgical choices, and the instance of following the Soviet model. These changes began almost immediately following the war, as early as 1949, with the end of private ownership and centralization of all theatre companies under one government agency. As with many of the changes brought on by the communists, this centralization was carried out quickly and involved replacing large numbers of employees with party-loyal members. While this process concerned all areas of culture, it hit theatre the hardest. For instance, in the first wave of such purges alone, “at least 700 employees of arts and culture lost their jobs, most of these (over 400) – people from theatre and film.” In other words, in a society where politics began to resemble theatre, theatre entered politics and became an integral part of the political machine.

Post 1948, all Czechoslovak theatres became centralized government institutions with a wide regional network. The centralization was accompanied by the proclaimed “need to disarm the forces of darkness.” Along with centralization and the establishment of a network of regional theatres, the party introduced a thorough re-evaluation of so-called “cultural heritage.” In practice, this meant lengthy discussions about what from the canon could and could not be considered socialism-friendly. Just as with the example concerning jazz in the Soviet Union, these meetings often relied on dubious argumentation for or against a certain Western play. As an example, Just cites a speech against Lysistrata made by a member of the Theatre and Dramaturgical Committee (DDR or DPK), Jaroslav Pokorny, at the June 1949 conference of the DDR and DPK in Teplice. Lysistrata is a comedy by Aristophanes. Originally performed in classical Athens in 411 BC, it is a comic account of one woman’s mission to end the Peloponnesian War. Lysistrata persuades the women of Greece to withhold sexual privileges from their husbands and lovers as a means of forcing the men to negotiate peace. However, Pokorny explains that Lysistrata is a woman who “rots the army,” and therefore “showing of this play is incompatible with the ideological work of theatre within the spirit of today’s state politics of defense.”

143 See Yurchak:2016, Chapter 5. The Imaginary West
144 Just: 2010, 53
145 Just: 2010, 55
146 Just:2010, 61
147 Just: 2010, 54
149 quoted in Just:2010, 58
The committee eventually created a five-year theatre development plan. According to this plan, dramaturgy was the most important component to theatrical planning. What was and was not permitted, dramaturgically, was thus set out in an official guideline, and all plays were divided into five hierarchical categories. According to Just, these were as follows:

1. a) original plays with contemporary themes,
   b) original plays with historical ideas from a contemporary perspective;
2. re-evaluation of Czech and Slovak dramaturgical heritage;
3. a) Russian and Soviet plays,
   b) plays by national democrats;
4. re-evaluation of world classics; and
5. progressive Western plays.\(^{150}\)

It is difficult to call this categorization precise. Instead, it is a list of general instructions, which can be interpreted as needed. In the 1950s, this meant a rather severe narrowing of entire genres – “big tragedy, tragedy, tragi-comedy, psychological drama, satire, grotesque, pantomime, literary cabaret and others” virtually disappeared from Czechoslovak stages.\(^{151}\) However, as the country entered Normalization, the effect of the performative shift allowed for almost any script to be fitted into the necessary criteria and consequently allowed or censored.\(^{152}\) For instance, in 1949, a play such as Alfred Jarry’s *King Ubu*,\(^{153}\) with its defiant “*Merdre!*”\(^{154}\) at the opening of the show, “[l]ay beyond the realities of the dramaturgy and perception of the day.”\(^{155}\) However, by 1964, *King Ubu* was successfully staged in Prague by the director Jan Grossman and then censored again in 1968 following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.\(^{156}\) The examples of *Lysistrata* and *King Ubu* are similar to Yurchak’s description of the Soviet attitudes towards jazz, which were adjusted according to the political situation or the view of an individual minister. In other words, nothing remained beyond the form (the five categories of recommended plays) to uphold the system.

Similarly, in Poland, we can observe a phenomenon that Kathleen M. Cioffi identifies as “the paradox of censorship.”\(^{157}\) In her overview of the types and manifestations of alternative theatre in late-socialist Poland (in her case, 1954–1989), Cioffi observes a characteristic that would appear to be paradoxical to “those who did not live in Communist countries”\(^{158}\) – the fact “that something like alternative theatre, with its more or less explicit critique of politics, could exist.”\(^{159}\) She then explains that, despite the externally (and sometimes internally) monolithic appearance of the Soviet system, the “level of strictness” in censorship was widely affected by the specific moment in history or by the geographical region. On the one hand, as in neighboring Czechoslovakia, the “... People’s Poland considered the

\(^{150}\)Just:2010, 59
\(^{151}\)Just: 2010, 61
\(^{152}\)ibid

153 *Ubu Roi* (*Ubu the King* or *King Ubu*) is a play by the French playwright and creator of Pataphysics, Alfred Jarry. It was first performed in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, causing a riotous response in the audience as it opened and closed on December 10, 1896. The single-word opening line of the play is often considered the main cause of the riot, as it was the first time a word closely resembling “shit” was uttered on the theatre stage. The play takes a place the “non-existent kingdom of Poland” - a scathing political commentary at the time, as Poland was temporarily taken off the map of Europe. See: “Ubu Roi.” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubu_Roi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubu_Roi)

154 *merde* [Fr.], meaning “shit”, with an extra “r” added by the author

155 Just:2010, 57

156 The performance was made into a TV play a month before the invasion of 1968 but was not broadcast until 1990.

157 Cioffi:1996, 12-13

158 ibid, 12

159 ibid, 12

34
theatre one of the most important means in the process of building a socialist culture.”¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, though, this socialist culture contained a multi-tiered and malleable structure for funding and approving theatrical projects. For instance, Cioffi points out that Polish alternative theatre groups that started “under the aegis of university sponsorship ...” were “... subject to less strict censorship.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, much depended on the specific minister or sensor, just as with the fate of Lysistrata in the Czechoslovak example above. Cioffi quotes Eva Hoffman, a Polish-American academic and writer, who explains that “you could always say to your boss, ‘There’s nothing underneath this’ ... [a]nd then maybe both you and your boss could pretend there was nothing there.”¹⁶² Similarly, the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street, which is the subject of the next chapter, was receiving funding from the city of Warsaw as a collective, while some of its members, such as Miron Białoszewski, were prohibited from publishing their poetry individually. Overall, the process of extending ideological control over cultural institutions, and the vague and unsystematic way in which this was done, contributed (in line with Yurchak’s work) to the performative shift, which in turn enabled the creation of places of vnenahodimost.

1.4 Chapter Conclusion
This chapter has laid a foundation for what follows and has provided historical context. In his evaluation of memory and group identity, historian John Tosh points out that “for any social grouping to have a collective identity, there has to be a shared interpretation of the events and experiences that have formed the group over time.”¹⁶³ The purpose of this chapter was to provide an understanding of the way in which this interpretation arose in Czechoslovak and Polish everyday life and to examine the forces that (consciously or not) shaped this shared interpretation. This chapter looked at the mobile, chaotic mid-1940s and examined the empirical opulence of Stalinism. It also explored mature socialism and defined key, historically imbedded terms that will be used in the rest of this study, the most important of which is places of vnenahodimost.

This chapter additionally aimed to illustrate how the last decades of Soviet power differed in Czechoslovakia and Poland. This is important to the understanding of certain aspects of my case studies which may seem, at first glance, contradictory: for example, why Theatre on Tarczyńska received a generally favorable reaction from the city hall while Šlépěj v Okně ended with a series of police interrogations. In the former case, the project was situated in post-Stalinist Poland and the paradox of censorship allowed the group for be tolerated as a youth collective, while individual members, for example Białoszewski, were not widely published. The latter case, however, took place in the midst of Czechoslovak Normalization, meaning a renewed tightening of censorship and a heightened nervousness on the part of the police towards non-regulated gatherings of citizens.

When it comes to interpreting my case studies from a theoretical standpoint, this chapter contributed necessary context regarding the so-called public imagination of the time. “Public imagination” is a notion discussed by Chiara Bottici in her work on imaginal politics and she says it reflects the “social character of our capacity to imagine.”¹⁶⁴ As suggested in this chapter, the public imagination in the Soviet sphere was actively shaped by a focus on a renegotiated past (in the form of Victory Day parades, for instance) and a sunny future (frequently depicted in social realism art). In such a setup, the present can be seen as always in transition between two imaginary realms. From this point of view, the case studies I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3 can be interpreted as pauses/interruptions in the transitory

¹⁶⁰Filler:1977, 32
¹⁶¹Cioffi:1996, 13
¹⁶²Ibid
¹⁶³Tosh:2010, 3
¹⁶⁴Bottici:2014, 43

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process caused by the immediacy of live performance. This means that, possibly, the projects I address in this study arranged an alternative to public imagination not only on spatial, but on temporal terms. I discuss the implications of this at the end of this study (Concluding Notes). At this point, I move on to the examination of case studies situated in urban apartments (Chapter 2) and various non-domestic locations (Chapter 3).

Chapter 2. Apartment as Heterotopia
- Bulgakov envied nothing, save for a good apartment. (Anatolii Swartz:1988)\(^{165}\)

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter addresses those of my case studies whose projects were situated in and integrally linked to urban apartments. These are Theatre on Tarczyńska (Teatr na Tarczyńskie, 1955–58, Warsaw) with its subsequent reincarnation – Miron Białoszewski's Separate Theatre (Teatr Osobny, 1958–1963, Warsaw) – and Footprint on a Window (Šlépěj v Okně, 1973–1975, Brno). The analysis here revolves around Lefebvre's notion of the spatial triad along with Foucault's notion of heterotopia and focuses on the relationship between the physical/ideological space of the apartment and its imagined (in Lefebvre's words – social) aspect. According to Lefebvre, these three spatial aspects or layers exist in an interplay and together produce what we perceive as space. Via an examination of how my case studies engaged with the physical and ideological layers of apartments, I arrive at an interpenetration of how these projects altered the imagined dimension. In order to achieve this, I first discuss apartments in more general terms and then introduce my case studies, followed by a chapter conclusion.

In his *Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard writes that “[a] house constitutes a body of images that give” humankind “proofs or illusions of stability”\(^{166}\) because a house “is imagined as a vertical being” and “as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality.”\(^{167}\) In contrast, an urban apartment complex, to Bachelard, presents a set of “superimposed boxes” that “have no roots.”\(^{168}\) Citing Paul Claudel, Bachelard calls apartments “conventional holes”\(^{169}\) and states that “[h]ome has become mere horizontality” and “...a house in a big city lacks cosmicity.”\(^{170}\) Allow me to disagree. French philosopher's distaste for urban homes aside, an apartment, in opposition to the house's “centrality” presents an entirely different complex, multidimensional and many-layered blend of concepts. Despite being similar to the house as another type of human dwelling, the apartment is somewhat of a paradox – a self-contained unit, yet one embedded within countless blended networks, both material and imaginary. This blend goes a long way in structuring the self-identity, the choices and the relationships of apartment dwellers to other people, objects and reality as a whole. However, the effect of the apartment blend on its inhabitants is far from direct and one-way (as the Soviet governments imagined it when they drafted housing policies in the hopes that, for instance, communal housing will eradicate the need for private property). Rather, the relationship between home and human is a symbiosis of the two, with the addition of many more elements. Apartments have been affected by historical flux, as have humans. These changes, as this chapter demonstrates, have in turn affected the inhabitants of the apartments.

165 Ничему не завидел Булгаков, квартире хорошей.
166Bachelard:1958, 17
167ibid
168Bachelard:1958, 26-27
169ibid
170ibid
During the period with which this study is concerned, apartments in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc were frequently and consciously used to navigate – with varying degrees of success – the formation of the so-called “communal bodies,” or Socialism-minded citizens with personality traits deemed to be positive in the context of Marxist/Leninist ideology (for instance, a collective spirit). On occasion, though, apartments also served as venues for what Alexei Yurchak calls places of vnenahodimost and Michel Foucault - heterotopias (both terms are addressed in this and earlier chapters and are loosely defined as “spaces of otherness,” although there is a distinction between the two). In other words, apartments were called upon to expose and hide, manipulate and protect, and uphold ideological ideals or bypass (or dismantle) them.

2.2 The Non-Narrative Self at Home (the apartment blend)

To Lefebvre, a domestic space such as an apartment is “lived – not represented (or conceived)...compared with the abstract spaces of the experts (architects, urbanists, planners), the space of the everyday activities...is a concrete one, which is to say, subjective.” This subjectivity can be interpreted in other ways, which I discuss below, and is of central importance for the subsequent interpretation of undertakings such as Theatre on Tarczyńska. In this case, I take subjectivity to mean self-identity and, in relation to home, the non-narrative identity discussed in some detail in the Introduction to this study (and further below).

Another way to formulate non-narrative identity is through Vaclav Cílek’s and Gerard Manley Hopkins’ notion of “inscape.” Cílek shares insights from a geologist’s point of view in his book on identity – Inner and Outer Landscapes (2005, 2010). An inner landscape, or inscape, as Cílek calls it, quoting the British poet Gerard Monleye Hopkins, is an “inner space or inner landscape,” which lies in opposition to an “outer” landscape. Cílek is an inter-disciplinarian, combining geology and philosophy in his writing, and “inscape” is a term that originates in literature, but Cílek lends a geologist’s perspective to it. Cílek takes up Hopkins’ understanding of inscape as an “inner space,” a “certain type of inner pattern or rhythm;” however, to Cílek, the inscape is formed and transformed through the interaction with its outside extension – the landscape – and vice versa. Rather than defining the internal world through opposition to the external, this interpretation presents the inner self as a result of ongoing dialogue with the outside environment. The notion of an evolving inscape also abandons the image of the self as a stable, singular entity. Instead, the human inner world emerges as a land: always changing, horizontal, non-hierarchical and non-narrative. Most importantly, the inscape has the capacity to blend with the landscape, and in Cílek’s words, “in this process then a new inner landscape is formed.” The flexible notion of inscape, defined by interplay and dialogue, is useful when addressing the relationship between complex hybrid spaces (such as apartment performance venues) and non-narrative human identities. In other words, hybrid spaces and their importance are better understood when the identity is explained as a multi-channeled, evolving flow because such an approach allows for a view outside the direct cause-and-effect (space-on-human) perspective and opens analytical options beyond binary divisions (inside-outside).

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171 Of course, this was by no means a new idea, not only for this time period and not only in the USSR. The work of Le Corbusier or Karel Lhota are just two examples.
172 Лебина:2017, 17
173 Лебиевре:1991, 362
174 Cílek:2010
175 Cílek:2010, 5
176 Cílek:2010, 5
Hopkin’s and Cilek’s inscape is not the only term that approaches human identity in relation to the
environment in a such a way. According to the cognitive scientist Mark Turner (see Introduction),
identity is a process – an example of what Turner calls “advanced cognitive blending” – that produces
the human inner self, frequently in interplay with external input. Turner writes, “we construct a
personal sense of self, a stable identity that undergoes change. Actually, we can construct different
personal senses of self, depending on what mental web is active in our brains and what is brought to
mind by props in our circumstances, and still feel that, although we were different just a few minutes
ago, the self we happen to be right now is utterly stable.” That is to say, what humans perceive to be a
singular “I” is, from a cognitive perspective, a flow of multiple “I”s that continuously evolve through
communication with their environment. In other words, Turner’s observations of the structure of the
self compliment Cilek’s description of inscape as a dialogical process of identity construction.

The props and circumstances that our minds use to construct a self can be anything; however, few
places are as vital to the process of self-identity formation as the domestic space. According to Turner,
the importance of the space people inhabit – their own personal landscape – is fundamental to how
their inner world is formed and therefore how they perceive themselves. In Bachelard's words: “...over
and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of
organic habits.” Lefebvre adds that it is a space that “has an origin, and that origin is childhood, with
its hardships, its achievements, and its lacks.” As a place where humans spend their most intimate
moments, home is a mental web that contributes heavily to the construction of what people perceive as
their most real selves (as in, “at home, I am most myself”). Likewise, humans constantly adapt their
surroundings to better fit who they are, thus completing a sort of ever-evolving and expanding feedback
loop. A contradiction exists in this loop: a perceived stable, singular identity resulting from the vast ebb
and flow of mental data. The contradiction, according to Turner, is partly masked by the more or less
unchanging everyday environment. That is to say, the mind is renewing its information all the time, but
as long as the information it renews remains the same (the sky is still up, and one’s face in the mirror is
the same one that was seen a few hours ago), the mind will continue to perceive the self as unchanged.

Lefebvre, in turn, observes that “[o]ne of the most glaring paradoxes about abstract space is the fact
that it can be at once the whole set of locations where contradictions are generated, the medium in
which those contradictions evolve and which they tear apart, and, lastly, the means whereby they are
smothered and replaced by an appearance of consistency.” That is to say, the domestic space
supporting the perception of a stable self-identity is consistent only on the surface. In reality, it contains
contradictions and transitory areas so complex that, in her study of domestic spaces, Chiara Briganti
observes, “... the history of interior is a history of the mapping and crossing of boundaries” and
Svetlana Boym writes that an archeology of everyday life necessarily “studies border zones between
the routine and the ideological, the mundane and the aesthetic.” From a cognitive perspective,
ambiguous components of domestic environments – “[m]irrors, shadows, impressions, echoes [...] are
so routinely used to support advanced blending that an entire study could be conducted on the
subject.” In other words, Lefebvre's “glaring paradox” lands in the centre of our self-identities and
makes a humble apartment much more interesting.

This interest is reflected in the arts, manifesting in several ways which I discuss later in this study. One

177Turner:2014, 65
178Bachelard:1958, 14
179Lefebvre:1991, 362
180Lefebvre:1991, 363
181Briganti: 2012, 73
182Boym:2002
183Turner:2014, 67

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example, however, merits a closer look here. In Mikhail Bulgakov’s novel, the *Master and Margarita* (written 1928–1940, published 1966–1967), one of the leading roles in the plot is assigned to a Moscow apartment. This unassuming home, which originally belongs to a jeweler’s widow and is, at the start of the novel, inhabited by her and two other neighbors, is mysteriously vacated to accommodate a guest of some importance – Satan himself, along with his entourage. They prefer the apartment to a hotel, a house or indeed any other accommodation, despite the fact that they have anything they desire at their disposal. They take over the apartment, which already has the reputation of being a “bad” apartment where people disappear without a trace – a quality of the space that only intensifies with the guests’ arrival. During the course of the novel, the apartment expands and shrinks, and allows characters to pass through walls and otherwise entirely ignore the rules of physics and time. The rest of the buildings’ inhabitants observe the apartment intently – not only in an allusion to the Stalinist practice of constantly being spied on by one’s neighbors, but also because the lives of those who make a decision to come inside the apartment are forever transformed. The incongruence between the apartment’s instability (every visitor is greeted by a new set of circumstances) and the permanence of the changes inflicted upon the visitors (they end up mad, jailed or dead) is a continuous source of curiosity and fear for everyone in the building. In other words, Bulgakov’s satanic apartment permanently transforms and affects others, sees through disguises and defines who they really are, without having a constant identity itself.

Bulgakov’s fictional space reveals much about real-life apartments. The choice to place Satan in an apartment, rather than a house, goes beyond the author’s satirizing the hot-button issue of his day in the 1920’s, the so-called “apartment problem.” The tension created in the novel between the regular world of the building and the magic world of Satan’s lair would not be possible if the lair was a house. One of the reasons for this is the apartment’s lack of a house’s monumental solidity. In contrast to a house, the transformative ambiguity of the real-life apartment lends itself to the imagination (and literary fancy) in a vastly different way. The contrast between house and apartment is two-tiered: on one level, there is an architectural juxtaposition between them as two types of buildings; on the other, there is a conceptual opposition between a house and an apartment as types of dwellings.

From an architectural perspective, a free-standing house differs from an apartment complex in important ways. Looking back to Bachelard, whom I quoted at the start of this chapter, the house is grounded in earth; it is singularly present and wholly submitted to one’s ownership. The house, seen from this perspective, is the modern day equivalent of the fortress – a distant relative of the original, the same way as a pigeon is to a dinosaur. The apartment building, in contrast, is fragmented, composed of many small units within a larger whole. This fragmented structure is visible in everything – from windows to mailboxes – and it lends the apartment building a feeling of a dwelling not altogether human. If the house is a fortress, then the apartment building is a hive. Indeed, reading Bachelard's description, city apartments seem almost not fit for humans. It is perhaps the nonhuman structure that lends the units in a building their malleability and ambiguity, making them an ideal playground for writers such as Bulgakov.

If the house is seen not only as an architectural object but also as an anthropological one, then it can be compared to an apartment in yet another way. Roland Barthes, in his *Mythologies* (1957), compares a house to a ship. While this is a beautiful comparison, a far more apt one would be between a ship and an apartment rather than a house. A house, according to Bachelard, has roots – it has a basement and a roof and shares a different relationship to nature than an apartment. An apartment is much closer to Barthes’ description of a “cubby hole,” an enclosed, finite unit populated with well-worn, familiar objects, sailing in a fluctuating sea of a city. Barthes writes that “the ship may well be a symbol of

184Bachelard:1958, 27
departure; it is, at a deeper level, the emblem of closure. An inclination for ships always means the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself, of having at hand the greatest possible number of objects, having at ones disposal an absolutely finite space.”¹⁸⁵ On the one hand, time also works differently inside the apartment and outside of it. Time moves at a different speed and changes the space in a different way. On the other hand, deterritorialization as defined by Alexei Yurchak (see Ch.1) also affects temporal perception. This is especially relevant to later analyses of apartment theatres because, as Yurchak points out, “it would be erroneous to examine space and time of communication in various social milieus as certain ‘islands’ of truth and freedom¹⁸⁶, isolated from the spatial-temporal governmental regime.”¹⁸⁷ In reality, he continues, the relationship between government and private life was much more intertwined, resulting in a kind of “phenomenological inversion between private and public.”¹⁸⁸

2.3 Notes on Soviet Domesticity

-I will definitely, definitely buy an apartment in St. Petersburg ... (Tatyana Tolstaya, Raisins:2005)¹⁸⁹

The imaginary domestic in a society this study deals with was, as it is in any society, shaped by a blend of time-and-place-specific cultural, political and social forces. Soviet domesticity, in other words, was a complex hybrid of state policy, waves of housing crises, increasing industrialization, nostalgia and comings-and-goings of everyday existence.

Russian cultural anthropologist Natalia Lebina writes that, “[b]y the start of the 20th century, a specific housing structure was formed in Russian cities, corresponding to the level of urban development and communal technology and reflective of social stratification of the population.”¹⁹⁰ However, according to Lebina, the early 20th century still saw a house as a typical living space for urban dwellers. This perception began to change with the revolution, when the “events of October 1917 loosened the urban resident's understanding of a stable representational norm – the ‘house’. ”¹⁹¹ By the 1950s and late 60s, the mainstays of Soviet housing where the kommunalka (Rus., kommunalka in Pl.) and the khrushchevka (Rus., known in Czech as panelák, after the concrete panels used to construct the buildings). A kommunalka was a communal apartment while a khrushchevka, which appeared much later and was named after Nikita Khrushchev, usually housed one family at a time and came with non-shared facilities. Both of these urban housing models appeared in Poland and Czechoslovakia, albeit with variations, stemming from a desire to emulate socialist architectural trends and a prolonged, persistent housing crisis.

¹⁸⁵Barthes:1957, 74

¹⁸⁶Although František Stárek (Ch 3.) uses this term – islands of freedom – in his native Czech, he does so with a rounded, first-hand understanding of the accompanying socio-historical context.

¹⁸⁷Юрчак:2016, 308

¹⁸⁸ibid

¹⁸⁹“Непременно, непременно куплю себе квартиру в Питере...” (Татьяна Толстая:2007)

¹⁹⁰“К началу XX столетия в российских городах сложилась определённая структура жилья, соответствовавшая уровню градостроительной и коммунальной техники, а также отражающая социальную стратификацию населения. В представлении горожанина 'дом' ассоциировался с индивидуальным жилищем, наличие которого считалось нормой повседневной жизни.” (Лебина:2016, 67)

¹⁹¹“...события октября 1917 года во многом расшатали сформировавшееся в ментальности городского жителя устойчивое представление-норму – 'дом’.” (Лебина:2016, 67)
Natalia Lebina writes that “[t]he foundation of the realities of the housing policy of the Bolsheviks was the idea of a fair distribution of material wealth, including real estate.”¹⁹² The implementation of these notions in real life, though, was not as straightforward. Lebina points out that, even in such standardized housing projects such as khrushchevka buildings, some apartments were of much higher quality that others, having been intended for use by Party officials.¹⁹³ State ownership, too, was somewhat malleable, as Ilya Utekhin explains in greater detail:

Some things Soviet people considered as free from the state. This was for many citizens housing, because public housing was received without payment for its provision, and payments for housing (“rent”) were relatively small and amounted to no more than one tenth of the family budget. Although the rent was formally considered a rent, no one thought of their housing as rented. The rent was perceived rather as a fee for the maintenance and maintenance of housing in good condition.

At the same time, provided housing (if you were registered there permanently and “with the right to living space”) was the property of the family – in the sense that descendants and direct heirs acquired the same right: “having been born” in this living space, they, as a rule, received a full residence permit on it (at the place of registration of parents) automatically. In some limited sense, this was the equivalent of not ownership, but the right to use. When dividing the family, you could “exchange” this property for two or more parts.¹⁹⁴

Lebina writes that for a long time “[t]he main type of housing in the Soviet city was a communal apartment, in the depth of which there were formed special norms of life.”¹⁹⁵ Christine Varga-Harris, who writes extensively on domesticity during the Stalin and Khrushchev eras, notes that “[t]he communal apartment never became a place where normal life could arise.”¹⁹⁶ Instead, “the illusion of clear-cut public and private realms is shattered”¹⁹⁷ and a specific domestic culture developed around the kommunalka, complete with its own rules and folklore.¹⁹⁸ In the words of Svetlana Boym, “[e]ach communal apartment had its own myths and its own folklore ... You can write the history of Russia as the history of a huge communal apartment with all its mysteries and secrets.”¹⁹⁹ As a consequence of state policies regarding housing, combined with everyday reality, an ambiguity arose “... from the incompatibility of the state’s desire to exert total control with the individual citizen’s need for private

¹⁹²“Фундаментом реалий жилищной политики большевиков стала идея справедливого распределения материальных благ, в число которых входила и недвижимость.” (Лебина:2016)
¹⁹³Лебина:2016
¹⁹⁴Некоторые вещи советские люди рассматривали как доставшиеся им от государства бесплатно. Таким для многих граждан было жилье, ведь доставалось государственное жилье без платы за его предоставление, а платежи за жилье («квартплата») были сравнительно невелики и составляли не больше одной десятой части семейного бюджета. Хотя квартплата вроде и формально считалась арендной платой, никто не думал о своем жилье как съемном; у государства не снимали, снимали у частников, и тогда арендная плата превышала государственную квартплату в четыре-пять раз (это был элемент рынка в нерыночном море социализма). Так что квартплата воспринималась скорее как плата за эксплуатацию и поддержание жилья в исправном состоянии.
При этом предоставленное жилье (если ты был прописан там постоянно и “с правом на жилплощадь”) было достоянием семьи - в том смысле, что потомки и прямые наследники приобретали то же самое право: “родившись” на этой жилплощади , они, как правило, получали полноценную прописку на ней (по месту прописки родителей) автоматически. В каком-то ограниченном смысле это было эквивалентом не собственности, а права на использование. При разделье семьи можно было “разменять” это достояние на две или несколько частей.” (Утехин:2007, 90)
¹⁹⁵“Основным видом жилья в советском городе становилась коммунальная квартира, в недрах которой действовали особые нормы жизни.” (Лебина:2016, 106)
¹⁹⁶“Коммунальная квартира так и не оказалась местом, где смогла возникнуть нормальная жизнь.” (Варга-Харрис: 2011, 162)
¹⁹⁷Johnston:2013, 405
¹⁹⁸See Утехин in Неклюдов:2003
¹⁹⁹“Каждая коммуналка имела свои мифы и свой фольклор...Можно написать историю России как историю огромной коммунальной квартиры со всеми ее загадками и секретами.” (Бойм:2002)
Thus, as Boym writes, “[b]y the middle and especially towards the end of the 60s, privacy was seen in the informal culture almost as the only model of uncompromising behavior. Private life was not an escape from reality, but an attempt to create a parallel reality that does not work according to ideological schemes.”

This ambiguity reflected itself in a specific way in which the apartment, the home and everyday domesticity crop up in Czech, Polish and Russian theatre and literature. There are plays wherein the apartment is no less important than the characters, for instance Mikhail Bulgakov’s Zoya’s Apartment (1925), Vaclav Havel’s The Family Evening (1960) and Slawomir Mrózek’s Tango (1964). In literature, we see this in Andrej Bitov’s Apothecary Island (1968), Sasha Sokolov’s School for Fools (1976) and Milan Kundera’s Laughable Loves (1970) – all written as neurotic narratives about apartments, dachas and the minute details of everyday life. There is a tendency in all of these works to represent the everyday with a mixture of aversion and nostalgia. After a series of grotesque adventures, Bulgakov’s Zoyka closes the play with a desperate “Farewell, farewell, my apartment!”

Housing is often a source of dark humor, as in Mikhail Bulgakov’s aforementioned play about Zoyka or Zdeněk Svěrák’s film Ball Lighting (1979), and a source of tragedy in reality where people in Soviet kommunalkas were known to snitch on their neighbors in order to claim the newly available space. An apartment is a coveted commodity. Svetlana Boym observes a similar pattern in the artistic manifestation of furniture in early Soviet literature – as a manifestation of a world gone. This obsession with housing – founded on more than nostalgia – is, according to Boym, characteristic of Soviet-style socialism. Complications in or around housing form a place- and time-specific cultural marker. In such an environment, the concept of a home as a foundation of one’s identity gains a whole new meaning, since obtaining a home was often the central concern of one’s existence. At the same time, works of Socialist realism, intended to portray the new sunny and optimistic Socialist byt (or everyday routine), showed the communal apartment as a positive space of happy cohabitation – for example, paintings such as Housewarming (1937) or Moving to a New Apartment (1952) and films such as The Pokrovsky Gate (1982). Perhaps because of the arising paradoxes and ambiguity, Soviet apartment folklore does not treat the apartment as a solidly defined object – quite the opposite. Examples of this can be found across the spectrum of Soviet literature, from the aforementioned Mikhail Bulgakov’s “bad apartment” in 1920’s Master and Margarita, with its disappearing tenants and malleable square footage, and Sasha Sokolov’s 1970’s apartment in School for Fools, which mutates (for instance, into a green valley where the protagonist meets Leonardo da Vinci) with little effort (“It’s enough to swing open the door!..”)

2.4 The Apartment as a Heterotopia – Case Studies

200van Baak:2009, 384
201“Уже в середине и особенно к концу 60-х уход в частную жизнь стал рассматриваться в неофициальной культуре чуть ли не как единственная модель бескомпромиссного поведения. Частная жизнь представляла собой не побег от реальности, а попытку создания параллельной реальности, не работающей по идеологическим схемам.” (Бойм:2002, 118)
202“Прощай, прощай, моя квартира!” (Булгаков:1992)
203 Kulový Blesk, is a comedy which chronicles an operation during which an entire set of people in Prague arrange a brilliantly intricate exchange of apartments which are more suitable to their needs.
204Новоселье (К. Петров-Водкин, 1937)
205Переезд на новую квартиру (А. Лактионов,1952)
206Переезд на новую квартиру (А. Лактионов,1952)
207ненормальная квартира (Rus.)
208“Стоит только распахнуть дверь!” (Соколов:1999, 39)
The following sections of this chapter move away from a wider historical and conceptual discussion to explore specific case studies. To begin, I first offer relatively descriptive discussions of the projects and then use the chapter conclusion to explain what my empirical findings mean for the theoretical framework that I introduced earlier. Although the analysis in this chapter focuses primarily on the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street / Teatr Osobny and Šlepěj v Okně, they are by far not the only instances of performances in apartments. For example, as early as 1942, Polish theatre painter and director Tadeusz Kantor and a group of artists “met in private apartments all over Krakow under the Nazi occupation.”\textsuperscript{209} It was in one of these apartments that the first production of Kantor’s Independent Theatre – Juliusz Słowacki’s \textit{Balladyna} (1943) – took place, followed by Stanisław Wyspiański’s \textit{The Return of Odysseus} (1944). The Prague Surrealist group was founded in 1934 by the writer Vítězslav Nezval, 10 years after André Breton's revolutionary \textit{Manifeste du surréalisme}, and it is still active today – a fact that earned it the nickname of the “permanent avant-garde.”\textsuperscript{210} Having fallen from grace with the Communist Party after the war, the surrealists went underground and held a series of apartment meetings and staged readings by literary theoretician Vratislav Effenberger and others. The scripts for these one-acts were included in the Surrealist publication \textit{Surrealistické Vychodisko} (1969).

In 1976, Prague actress Vlasta Chramostová, along with a group of other artists, established a short-lived but influential experiment called simply Apartment Theatre (\textit{Bytové Divadlo}) – although the actress participated in similar projects as early as 1944, acting in Brno apartments. In her autobiography, Chramostová quotes professor Jiří Voráč, who termed her endeavor “the first phenomenon of its kind after 1948 ... i.e. an attempt at regular and composed theatrical activity outside of the official (state approved) sphere.”\textsuperscript{211} The Czech playwright Pavel Kohout describes the lengths to which the group went in order to maintain secrecy – for instance, setting up five decoy performance locations just to be able to record his \textit{Play Macbeth}, written specifically for Chramostová’s apartment theatre, in a sixth performance (the resulting records allowed Tom Stoppard, who was in communication with the group through the underground post, to write his \textit{Cahoots Macbeth}).\textsuperscript{212}

How do concepts such as deterritorialization or heterotopia engage with these types of projects while keeping in mind the historical context of domesticity (discussed earlier in this chapter)? How do the case studies below fit into a broader pattern and how do such activities interact with the non-narrative identities of their participants?

**Theatre on Tarczyńska Street (Warsaw, 1955 – 58) and Teatr Osobny (Warsaw, 1958 – 63)**

On early spring evening in 1955, the lobby and the stone staircase with pre-war carved wooden banisters of the building on Warsaw's Tarczyńska street 11 were buzzing with people climbing up to the fourth floor, to apartment 33, hoping for at least a glimpse of what went on inside. The building itself was rather ordinary, aside from the fact that it was one of the few to survive the methodical and meticulous demolition of Warsaw by the Nazi forces at the close of the war, almost ten years prior. But this building housed a secret.\textsuperscript{213}

The people who were lucky enough to make it inside the apartment that night were ushered into a large, crowded room with an alcove in the back, forming a sort of small stage. Along the perimeter of the

\textsuperscript{209}Witts:2010, 9

\textsuperscript{210}Tipper:2014, in book title

\textsuperscript{211}Chramostová:1999, 85

\textsuperscript{212}Kohout:1987, 15

\textsuperscript{213}Here and below: Kirchner, Białoszewski, Sobolewski

43
room were makeshift benches, arranged from ironing boards precariously balanced atop various crates. The room was packed. Those who did not manage to secure a seating place on the benches, simply sat or stood wherever space permitted, with the most daring climbing atop the wardrobe and other furniture. It was smoky. The windows were covered with black paper. At the back of the room, in the little stage-alcove, stood a small cupboard adapted to be a tiny stage. On this stage, the excited audience was treated to a double-bill of short plays enacted by the hands and fingers of the authors with the assistance of various mismatched objects, such as a real church goblet or a crystal salt shaker.

Today, the 1912 building is painted a mild pastel yellow, lodged between two newer structures and houses shops on the ground floor. It is rather cheerful, although during the period in question (1950s) the building and the street were described by witnesses as sad. In 1955 the building was populated by several members of the family of Lech Stefański, a young poet and playwright. After the death of her husband, Lech's aunt Olga moved into the kitchen and the adjoining room of her apartment, leaving her nephew with a large parlor. The Theatre on Tarczyńska Street 11 was a theatre founded in aunt Olga's home by three Polish writers – Bogusław Choiński, Miron Białoszewski and Lech Emfazy Stefański – and existed in Warsaw between 1955 – 58.

The authors produced short, highly visual works using household and found objects. They sought to give the playwright control of their creation from beginning to end. Thus, every author was also responsible for designing, directing and acting in his or her play. The theatre came into being in the Spring 1955 and saw four seasons. For a long while, only those specially invited were present, the entrance was free. The invitations, printed on small cards and signed by each of the evening's authors, included date, time and the address of the performance. However, the popularity of the project among the young artistic community grew quickly. Given the small size of the venue and no formal publicity, the theatre was very successful – with an estimated 7,000 viewers over three seasons. Despite their success, the group ended their collaboration after only four years.

This project, despite its fairly short life, was not an isolated flash of activity. Rather, from a more aerial perspective, it can be seen as an important contribution to the development of Polish avant-garde drama and a link in a chain of off-the-grid activity in Warsaw. The upcoming sections of this chapter record the history of Theatre on Tarczyńska but also position the project within the appropriate timeline and illustrate that the project was not an isolated experiment but a manifestation of a tendency which began during the Nazi occupation and continued with Miron Białoszewski's Separate Theatre (Teatr Osobny).

Early days of apartment culture – Nazi occupation of Warsaw

Theatre on Tarczyńska and its later reincarnation, Teatr Osobny, were apartment projects that did not appear suddenly or develop in isolation. An apartment culture in Warsaw can be traced even beyond the Nazi occupation and Stefański's and Białoszewski's projects were, in large, rooted in that tradition. For this reason, it is important to pause at the wartime meetings. For a detailed account of apartment activities in Warsaw during the Nazi occupation, I rely on the memoirs of Stanisław Prószyński, who was a Polish composer and friend to poet Miron Białoszewski and, after the war, to Stefański. Prószyński wrote and performed music for Teatr na Tarczyńska, ran front of house. After the somewhat scandalous demise of the theatre, Prószyński cut off all contact with Białoszewski for over twenty years. However, the composer recalls their intellectual adventures during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw (1939 - 45) with clarity.

Along with others, Prószyński, Białoszewski and Stanisław Swen Czachorowski – a poet and actor – formed a sort of nucleus of underground creative activity and their homes provided venues for
informal, conspiratorial meetings. Białoszewski termed these activities “patriotically-literary” 
patriotyczno-literarckie. Although the group did not officially organize themselves into any coherent 
movement with a name and agenda, Czachorowski, along with Białoszewski, Irena Prudil and Halina Zancberg created Teatr Swena (Swen's Theatre), active between 1942 – 44. Prószyński admits that the 
strictly secret nature of these gatherings, though not openly engaging with the occupants, comprised an 
vital element of opposition. Any creative and intellectual activity in Nazi-occupied Warsaw became, 
bymeans of its very existence, politically charged. Ownership of radios was punishable by death. Vinyl 
records and record players became a rarity. Nevertheless, live concerts were organized in Warsaw
and, in Krakow, Tadeusz Kantor staged performances in his Teatr Podziemny.

The format of a regular meeting between Prószyński and his friends went something like this: the 
beginning was always the same. Swen would bring along a pre-war record player with a single, 
scratched up vinyl containing Etiuda Rewolucyjna (Revolutionary Étude) by Frederick Chopin. Once 
all the guests (never more than 10 – 12) were gathered, Swen with utmost seriousness would play the 
record. Everyone listened to Chopin standing up. This patriotic ritual was followed by a varied 
program. This included poetry readings, music, theatre, literature and occasional visual arts exhibitions.

They read Thomas Mann, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Jan Parandowski. Prószyński described as 
especially memorable Swen's performance of other works by Słowacki, including another parody – in 
“Arabic costumes” and “desert setting”. This was year 1941 – 42. Prószyński recalls an audio 
performance of Karol Hubert Rostworowski's Judasz z Kariothu (Judas of Keroith, 1913) read from 
behind a curtain, followed by fragments from Maria Stuart (1830) by Juliusz Słowacki. At Miron's 
apartment, on 40 Chłodna Street, the audience was treated to a parody of Słowacki's Balladyna 
entitled Opera Stanisława P. Miron and Swen appeared in the doorway wearing white, floor-length 
dresses (likely made from bedsheets) and carrying containers for raspberry picking. Upon their 
entrance, the performers sang an opera duet “Staszka P.” to Słowacki's words.

The funniest was the fragment with the words: “What if I killed you, sister!” sang in 
Swen's ringing mezzo soprano (which turned out to be a falsetto) and Miron's reply in 
something resembling an alto: “What if you killed me, sister?”

This parody, however, was an exception. Most of the evenings had a serious tone. For example, a big 
impact on the group had Irena Prudil's reading of Miron Białoszewski's 1943 poem Jerozolima 
(Jerusalem). In its initial parts, the poet draws a parallel between the gates to the Warsaw Ghetto (the

214Kirchner:1996, 25  
215ibid  
216Classical music recitals took place at the coffeehouse of professor Bolesław Woytowicz (on Nowy Świat street). 
In 1943, a series of symphonic concerts took place at the Teatr Polski (Polish Theatre, renamed by the Nazis to Theater der 
Stadt Warschau). In the Concert Hall of Konserwatorium na Okólniku (Conservatory at Okólnik) further performances were 
arranged by the underground government through the Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (Central Welfare Council). In the Spring 
1944 these included the compositions of Andrzej Panufnik.  
217Prószyński is most likely referring to Słowacki's “Ojciec zadzumionych”, a long poem with an Arabic setting that was 
very popular as a subject of amateur performances. Text can be found here: https://literat.ug.edu.pl/ojciec/index.htm  
218Balladya, written by Juliusz Słowacki in 1834, is one of the best known works of Polish Romanticism. It is a tragic 
drama, which follows the violent and unlawful rise to power of fictional Queen Balladyna. The fragment of the play 
parodied by Swen and Białoszewski is a scene where Balladyna, still a regular girl, competes with her sister Alina at 
raspberry picking to win the hand of a royal groom. Upon noticing that Alina has more berries, Balladyna murders her. This 
crime sets off a chain of others which eventually lead to Balladyna's rise to the throne. The tragedy's main theme is the 
danger of power gained unlawfully and the impossibility of a healthy society under such rule. In 1943, Tadeusz Kantor 
staged Balladyna in a Krakow apartment. It was the first production of his Independent Theatre  
219Kirchner:1996, 25
“Ghetto-Gehenna”), which he could see daily from his window, and the gates to the Holy City²²⁰.

Another favorite activity of the artists consisted of prolonged walks, not always safe in the climate of the occupied city, around Warsaw. On these walks, Prószyński recalls, he and Białoszewski searched for theatre, which was an even bigger passion for them than music.²²¹ This need for the theatrical was fulfilled in the church, observing the performance of church rituals. They found it in the religious rituals, the mystery of which fascinated Białoszewski. This ritualistic aspect, along with the poet's famous walks, becomes important later, when Białoszewski goes on to create his own theatre, in part inspired by a church ritual he saw in a hut in the Carpathian mountains.

*After the war – Kobyłka*

After the war, Prószyński and his friends sought to revive the artistic meetings of their occupation days. Around this time, they made some new friends, most significantly for this study – Lech Emfazy Stefaniński. Swen, who went to Krakow to study acting professionally, returned to Warsaw and around 1947 moved into an apartment in the municipality of Kobyłka. A home that, both among the young intellectuals and their ideological opponents, was to become legendary. Białoszewski was working as a reporter and living in very poor conditions on Poznańska Street. His apartment was a post-War version of *komunałka*, where Miron shared a room, separated only by a thin divider, with strangers. He escaped his noisy neighbors by sleeping all day and writing or wandering the streets of Warsaw by night. He was at times stopped by the Communist police, befuddled by why would someone wander the streets aimlessly. At this time, Kobyłka – where Miron's friend Swen moved – was an area of Warsaw simultaneously inhabited by other poets, including Irina Prudil. Swen's apartment became a meeting place for young poets and an oasis of independent intellectual activity amidst the raging “war with formalism”. Forbidden from publishing their work and attacked by the press, the “long haired poets from Kobyłka” turned to discussions of creating an apartment theatre as an independent creative outlet in opposition to the official stage. The poets of Białoszewski’s generation “…turned their attention to ordinary objects and dull daily routine. These are seen as the only verifiable reality, the only objective facts which can be freed of moral preconceptions and delusions.”²²² However, their theatre transformed the site of this “dull daily routine” into a highly stylized, abstract and imaginative world.

*The Apartment*

The key point that separates Theatre on Tarczyńska from wartime apartment meetings is the deliberate choice of space. In Choińska's memoirs, the apartment plays a central role in the creation of Theatre on Tarczyńska – “before the theatre – there was the space”²²³ are the opening words in her memoir of the project. Stefaniński decided to create a home theatre out of artistic impulses rather than from a need to escape the reality of war. The function of the apartment, in this case, shifted from something that conceals to something that can be exploited to achieve a particular artistic effect. This effect was an alienating combination of the domestic features and the performances, which were decidedly non-realistic. One of the main reasons for this artistic choice was Stefaniński's interest in Witkacy’s²²⁴ theory

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²²¹ Kirchner:1996, 24
²²² Levine:1976, 40
²²³ Choińska in Kirchner:1996, 149
²²⁴Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, (1885 – 1939), Polish avant-garde author, playwright, theorist and painter
of Pure Form (Czysta forma) as a source of inspiration and experimentation for the theatre. Pure Form presented a set of ideas that Witkacy developed in relation first to poetry and then drama. Witkacy wrote that a certain type of “internal necessity” was at the core of his work and was more important than meaning or content. For Stefaniński this would mean work that did not, in contrast to politically charged wartime gatherings or contemporary activist theatre, enter into dialogue with any kind of system nor engaged into a narrative of any sort. Instead, he took the cue from Witkacy, who “...through the discontinuous affinities of actions in his model for Pure Form in the theatre...attempted to rouse the audience's deadened nerves to the point of amazement.” Kiebuzińska compares this approach to Marinetti’s, who wrote that “[p]oetry should be an uninterrupted sequence of new images...the broader their affinities, the longer the images keep their power to amaze.” If we connect this idea with Mark Turner's notion of identity (discussed earlier) as a self-renewing blend, we can see that this approach towards performance actively engages the non-narrative aspect of identity by removing all traces of discourse or narrative meaning. However, it is not only Stefaniński's attempts at embodying Witkacy's ideas on stage, but his decision to do so in a domestic setting that make Theatre on Tarczyńska a deterritorialized place. Here we have come full circle to the importance of the apartment for this project.

The street at the time was rather sad-looking, Choińska recalls. The floors of the building were very high and the climb up to the 4th floor was long. On the second floor lived Lech's mother, him and his aunt Ola resided on the fourth. Upon entering the apartment, one found themselves in a long hallway. The door to the right led to the room of Lech's aunt Ola, Lech's room was straight ahead. The room was very large with a big niche of “unknown purpose unless the architect was psychic” and foresaw the little theatre in the distant future. In the left corner resided a white tiled fireplace. Between the fireplace and the niche, Choińska continues, stood a wooden “baba”, a hag on whose face was carved an impressions of “crazy determination.” This hag, in the company of a gramophone and a baroque cherub, was the first thing to catch the eye of a visitor. The walls were covered in Witkacy's art – pastel portraits of women who “drilled you with their eyes”. The bigger part of the room was filled with makeshift benches and became the space for the audience. The niche, concealed with old fabric housed the stage and the backstage. Stefaniński himself describes his room in detail, the properties of which struck him as highly theatrical at first glance and were the final push towards the creation of the project. It was a vast, high ceilinged room, built in such a way that a four-meter separation with a wooden frame for lights divided the room into two unequal parts. From the hallway, one would enter into the bigger part of the room (it was about three times the size of the smaller part) which looked like a foyer. Stefaniński writes: “I was under the impression that the architect made a joke.”

Another push towards housing the theatre in Stefaniński's home came from an article he read on the French movement Art et Action. This was a theatre opened in 1919 by French architect Eudouard Autant and actress Louise Lara that operated in a Montmartre loft until 1938. Space was an integral component of Autant and Lara's work – Gray Read notes that “[i]n twenty years of work in theatre between the world wars, Architect Edouard Autant embraced performance as a means to explore how

225Choińska in Kirchner:1996, 150
226Indeed, Stefaniński's interest in Witkiewicz can be seen from the nickname “Emfazy” which Stefaniński chose in emulation of Witkiewicz's “Witkacy”
227Witkiewicz:1968, 296
228Kiebuzińska:1993,66
229Filippo Tommaso Emilio Marinetti (1876 – 1944), Italian poet, editor, art theorist, and founder of the Futurist movement
230Kiebuzińska:1993, 66
231Choińska in Kirchner:1996, 150
232ibid
233Stefaniński in Kirchner:1996, 141

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spaces act rather than how they look.” Art et Action believed that theatre fulfilled not one social role—but several and that to fulfill these roles theatre had to be performed in a different type of space. For example, the space needed for “academic theatre” had to be a library; social theatre had to occur in a public space akin to today’s shopping mall. Most importantly, the central cite for all of their experiments was their studio apartment, which is what inspired the Stefański decades later.

Format of the Evening Performances

The entire history of Theatre on Tarczyńska, as I mentioned before, lasted a span of four seasons (Fig.2.1, 2.2-2.3). Each of these consisted of three short performances written, designed, directed and acted out by the principal members of the company, nevertheless with copious assistance from other members of the group. The first set took place in the spring 1955. It was an evening of one-acts, performed inside a small wooden cupboard converted into a stage, as for a puppet performance. The shows took place inside the box, with the artists using only their hands and odd props such as a small household objects. There were two plays that first evening. These were, in order of appearance, Homunculus by Stefański and Wiwisekcja by Białoszewski. The latter, described by the author as a “monodrama for ten fingers” took place in an open box inside of which a tiny set comprising of small household objects was placed. Białoszewski’s gloved hands and his fingers became a Greek chorus or a group of nuns in an absurd non-narrative. I discuss this play in more detail below, in the section on Białoszewski's Separate Theatre.

The preparations for the second season began in 1956. The resulting program was three different full-evening bills presented in rotation. Each of the theatre's founding members had an evening to himself. The first was Stefański's, followed by Białoszewski's and finally Choiński's.

The infamous (because it did not do well) third season was an experiment – the group was offered a space in a cultural youth centre Hybrid [Hybrydy] (on Mokotowska street) and decided to capitalize on the opportunity. The outcome consisted of two evenings of performances – one Stefański's and one Białoszewski's but, according to Prószynski’s recollections, the incomparable atmosphere of a home-turned-theatre was missing and the group promptly returned to Tarczyńska. Choiński also recalls that the atmosphere was different in Hybrid, a club where the project was invited to perform – she reports that “something was missing.” Nevertheless, the group made another attempt at playing outside the apartment – on New Year’s eve, 1956 they performed at Środmiejski Dom Kultury. This, again, was a disappointment according the Prószynski.

The fourth and final season was carried out without Miron Białoszewski and that is the reason why, in his biographies, we come across Teatr na Tarczyńskiej as having only three seasons. In fact, Stefański carried on with his project while, in the meantime, Białoszewski was already setting up Teatr Osobny over at his place at Plac Dąbrowskiego. Such as it was, the 4th season of Teatr na Tarczyńskiej

234 Read: 2005, 4
235 “Monodram na dziesięć palców” in Teatr Osobny, Białoszewski: 1973
236 Kirchner: 1996, 39
237 By ironic coincidence, this club, being a public venue, converted the hybrid nature of the apartment theatre into a more orthodox theatre performance
238 Kirchner: 1996, 40
239 Choińska in Kirchner: 1996, 150
contained only two works: *W.S.* by Stefański and *Model jest Bestija* by Maria Fabicka.

Every season saw a run of several dozens of performances and the seating capacity, according to Prószyński's estimate, was 30 – 40 people not taking into account floor seating and standing room – people would sit or stand wherever possible, even, as I mentioned earlier, climbing the furniture to get a better look.\(^{240}\) To this end, Prószyński expands his estimate, writing that at full, the apartment could accommodate up to 120 audience members. Taking into account the group's performances outside of the apartment – at Hybrid and also at Dom Kultury, Prószyński estimates roughly over 7000 viewers over the four years of the theatre's existence, as I already mentioned.\(^{241}\) The group additionally recorded one of their shows – a popular song adapted to serve as an interlude – on the radio, significantly widening their audience base.

For a long time, entrance to the theatre was by invitation only. The invitations would be typed on small cards, hand-signed by all the authors and informing of the date, time and address of the performance. However, with theatre's popularity grew its attendance. Prószyński recalls writers, directors, actors and even school visits. At one point, even a minister. Indeed, the Minister of Culture (Włodzimierz Sokorski) granted the project 20,000 złoty (roughly the cost of a car at the time). The group divided the money among members by function, with each one receiving 200 złoty – this was because they identified 100 jobs within the company.\(^{242}\) This point perhaps best illustrates the paradox of censorship I discussed in Chapter 1, but is also a reflection of the changing attitudes of the Polish Thaw and a sharp contrast to the situation in Czechoslovakia 12 years later, when Jiří Kuběna (discussed below) conducted his apartment gatherings.

In case of Teatr na Tarczyńska, the hybrid nature of the undertaking is extended and is visible in the objects and the way the objects are used in performance. Frequently, these are everyday, household objects such as spoons and chairs stylized as props or the adaptation of household objects to serve as elements of theatrical architecture – for instance, the use of ironing boards to form rows of seats, theatre-like. The elements of a theatre, such as the curtain, the rowed seating, the darkness were strictly observed in the apartment setting, despite the fact that the group consciously rejected a traditional theatrical space. We must also remember that to Stefański, who harbored the idea of an apartment theatre even during the war – according to him and others – the apartment of his aunt elicited a “theatricality” that the participants of *Šlépěj v Okně*, a Czechoslovak project I discuss later in this chapter, assigned to their place as well. In other words, to the young post-war generation a grand Secession home, with its four-meter ceilings and a big hall already contained a theatricality not apparent in a regular home. These places carried with them an otherness that lent itself to creative interpretation in a different way than the needs of someone like Chramostová, who set her performances at her Prague home as an act of private defiance and who darkened her windows to avoid being noticed by the neighbors or the police.

As for costumes, Stefański concocted complex structures out of chairs and wire and everyday household objects in a such a way that the objects interacted with his body, creating a hybrid being out of a regular person and regular objects (Fig.2.4). In this way, ordinary material items were transfigured into an extraordinary abstract beings. Of interest also is Białoszewski's use of paper to create costumes and props. These were flat, crudely painted and sometimes reminiscent of the cutouts one sees at fairs.

\(^{240}\)Kirchner:1996, 40
\(^{241}\)Kirchner:1996, 56-57
\(^{242}\)Sobolewski:2012, 42
and concerts, where a person can put their face into the cutout oval and get their picture taken with another body. Here again, the actor would keep their face, but the rest would become someone or something else. These invented beings, hybrids of humans and household objects, simultaneously deterritorialized both the actor's body and the domestic. This becomes significant in the light of my earlier discussion of inscape or Turner's idea of self-identity in relation to everyday household things. Specifically, Turner's notion that a self-identity is a complex, constantly renewing blend of impulses that are reinforced by the surrounding environment. This is similar to the relationship of inscape (our inner world) to landscape (the outside that shapes and is shaped by the inside). In the case of Stefański's chair-person, there is a deeply ironic inversion of both Turner and Cilek's ideas (not deliberate, of course – Stefański worked some time before both Turner and Cilek). In the case of the chair-person, the non-narrative self, which is fed by daily routine and household objects, is inverted and moved to the exterior of the actor's body. The self is turned inside-out, rendered material and now covers Stefański like a metaphorical exoskeleton. It is a transition of inscape into landscape and is thus another double inversion: this hybrid is now contributing to the self-identity blends of his audience, re-entering inscapes of others and, in this way, demolishing narrative elements of identities by establishing a non-narrative loop between himself and his viewers. The chair-person and those who share the space with him are, at least momentarily, disengaged from reality, existing “out of”, deterritorialized. This, in effect, comes very close to Witkacy's statement that every moment has to amaze the audience and “[e]verything must be transformed in a way no one has ever seen before”\textsuperscript{243}. Kiebuźnińska notes that, “[c]onsidered with the increasing mechanization of life, Witkacy hoped that his theater would shock the spectator's nervous system and act as a stimulating shower after long hours of stupefying work.”\textsuperscript{244} The motivation was similar in Stefański's case, except with the added dimension of attempting to create an experience of Pure Form within a home. The result of Stefański's experiment was an domestic heterotopia, where both the rules of regular life and the conventions of theatrical avant-garde were broken, blended and reworked.


Separate Theatre (Teatr Osobny) was a Warsaw apartment theatre, formed after the dissolution of Theatre on Tarczyńska Street. It functioned from 1958 to 1963 in the home of the poet and playwright Miron Białoszewski at Plac Dąbrowskiego 7, apartment 13. This new project was, in some ways, an extension of the Theatre on Tarczyńska, although only Białoszewski remained out of the original Tarczyńska group and all formal association with the previous project was deliberately severed. The new collective comprised of the artist Ludmiła Murawska, writer Ludwig Hering and Białoszewski. The choice to name the project Separate Theatre was both an artistic statement and an intentional reference to the rift between Białoszewski and Tarczyńska's main creator, Lech Emfazy Stefański. Although the Separate Theatre was a collaborative effort between Murawska, Hering and Białoszewski, the project is known primarily as Miron's, due not only to the fact that it took place in his home, but also because of the 1971 publication of the collection of plays by Białoszewski titled Teatr Osobny, with an introduction by Artur Sandauer as well as Białoszewski's own small introductory note. The book contained all the plays written by Miron for the apartment theatre, including the plays performed by Białoszewski in Theatre on Tarczyńska.

Miron Białoszewski is primarily known to English-speaking readers as the author of A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising (1977). However, in Poland, he was very successful as a poet and well-known for his

\textsuperscript{243}“Everything must be transformed in a way no one has ever seen before,’ proclaims his prototype artist character in the 1925 Beelzebub Sonata (34).” (Kiebuźnińska:1993:66)

\textsuperscript{244}ibid
short, avant-garde plays – as Gassowski puts it: “Białoszewski made his debut three times and each
time the debut was loud: as a poet, playwright and prose writer.”245 One of the reasons for this
discrepancy – indeed, probably the main reason – is that the writer took pleasure in linguistic
experimentation of the kind that renders a work nearly untranslatable. In this way, he can be compared
to the Sasha Sokolov or E.E.Cummings. Białoszewski's ability to work in several genres and his
tendency to make up words is also reminiscent of Daniil Kharms. Białoszewski is a curious character in
Polish literature. His nocturnal lifestyle was notorious in the artistic circles of post-war Warsaw.
Olgierd Wołyński recalls that “... Miron, as a night person, was quite troublesome for a person
normally working.”246 He is frequently referred to as a private poet, someone who consciously selected
everyday objects and occurrences as subjects of this work, believing that only the minutiae of the
eyeryday were truly free of ideology.
Grácia Kerényi points out the difficulty of categorizing
Białoszewski's theatre work as well when she writes that “...Białoszewski's plays are grotesques,
sometimes tragi-grotesques, sometimes closely related to satire, parody”247. In this way, in Kerényi's
view, Separate Theatre can only be categorized as the “...'other' theatre of our times...”248

Jacek Kopciński sums Białoszewski's theatrical career as eight years of theatre-making: three with
Teatr na Tarczyńskiej and five with Teatr Osobny in his apartment on Plac Dąbrowskiego249. Although
these are Białoszewski's primary apartment theatre projects, the poet was theatrically active in many
other ways: he performed his program in television, recorded his work for radio (Wyprawy krzyżowe),
toured Poland (also as part of Teatr Osobny). Overall, Białoszewski's theatrical activity can be divided
into two phases. Teatr na Tarczyńskiej, which we discussed earlier in this chapter, and Teatr Osobny,
which we will address in this section. As a certain extension to his theatrical activities, we can add his
film experiments known as “flimikowanie” and Kabaret Kici Koci.

Białoszewski's Teatr Osobny produced five “seasons” (programs, they were called) or five sets of
performances and, not dissimilar to the previous project, ended due to alleged personal
misunderstandings between the three participants – Hering, Murawska and Białoszewski himself. In his
to-the-point encyclopedia of late-20th century Polish playwrights, Szczepan Gassowski sums up: “This
theatre was an unofficial, social event, though later sanctioned and sponsored by the Student Club
"Hybrydy"250. It worked for eight years251 and dissolved in a natural way. However, according to the
poet's calculations, about 14,000 viewers attended the nearly 300 presentations in Warsaw and in the
country, so despite the unsystematic character and exceptional audiences of the audience, it was a
phenomenon that caused some ferment in our artistic life.”252

The content of each program was a set of several “microdramas” (mikrodramaty) and poems. These
pieces did not have a specific plot, ordered sequence of events or cause-and-effect structure. The
starting point of a show was usually a linguistic ambiguity or a play on words, at times with well-
known literary/historical references. Gassowski notes that this “a small volume of plays – a dozen or so
dramatic miniatures – was an important event, despite being bound to the activity of his little theatre

245Gassowski:1979, 89
246O. Wołyński in conversation with Sobolewski, Hanna Kirchner:1996, 190
247Kerényi:1973, 8
248ibid
249Kopciński:1997, 13
250The name of this club, connected both to Białoszewski's and Stefański's hybrid projects, continues to feel somewhat
serendipitous to me.
251Gassowski treats both Tarczyńska and Osobny projects as one when it comes to Białoszewski's playwriting period. This
is why, from his point of view, the activity is eight years – Tarczyńska + Teatr Osobny
252Gassowski:1979, 89
The location was an unassuming post-war building on Plac Dąbrowskiego, where Białoszewski got an apartment in 1958. Although today the location is considered central, at the time it felt to the poet like the edge of the city. The apartment contained one room, a kitchen and a bathroom. Białoszewski moved in it with his partner, the sculptor Leszek Soliński and converted the kitchen into a salon, filling with with Soliński's artwork, thus turning a one-room flat into two. Wołyński, a friend of the poet, recalls the interior: “In the hall, a poster with sticks from Wiwisekcia, hanging on the door of this white wardrobe in the wall. A crowd sitting in a room on the floor. To your right side – piles of junk. To your left - a wall with angels. Black-shaded windows. Full to the brim. A lot of people going in and out. Who only did I not meet there then! 254 By 1963, the tradition of meeting was reborn, with the so-called “Tuesdays” which are remembered by their “family atmosphere”255. The “atmosphere” is cited also by Gassowski as one of the main reasons for the project's success: “[the project] aroused interest for several reasons: the oddity of the aura that pervaded the little theatre, a sense of sensation, 'forbidden fruit' or the very name of the already famous poet (though he did not have a single volume of poems yet, he was already winning competitions in 1953...)”256

Ambiguity/hybrids and ritual were two of the most important elements of Białoszewski's microdramas. Within these hybrids was a close interlacing of ritual with everyday life and intimate self-identity. As Sobolewski points out: “The need for theatre and theatricalization of one's life permeated the environment. It was a function of individualism, a kind of private liturgy. It created a protective layer defending against the great theatre of ideology that was playing out all around.257” Indeed, the idea of private liturgy – i.e. a public ritual carried out in privacy – is another example of the hybrid. Jacek Kopciński quotes Białoszewski providing a “…formula for his theatrical work258” in a conversation with Leszek Elektorowicz: “It is not a poetic narrative, but a dramatic synthesis in which the metaphor is realized on the stage259”. The idea of synthesis is key to understanding Białoszewski's theatre – for it is also a synthesis of place and time, where time is manipulated theatrically but place remains a private home. In other words, just as it is not a staged poem, it is not a theatre piece taking place in a home but separate from it – it is synthesis, a hybrid of the two which then produces a desired effect.

For instance, Wiwisekcia (which was staged at both Tarczyńska and Osobny, Fig.2.5-2.6) opens at an “empty amphitheater, with a jade-blue sky background” and a chorus yelling a series of random Greek words off-stage:

    VOICES OFF-STAGE, festively, like at a fairground

    Pa-nathenaic Games!
    Ob-lations!
    Cly-temnestra!
    Beta! Beta!

    Enter ten Fingers dressed in black robes and white collars, Rembrandt-style

253Gassowski:1979, 89
254Olgierd Wołyński in conversation with Sobolewski, Hanna Kirchner:1996, 191
255Karpowicz:2013, 242
256Gassowski:1979, 89
257Sobolewski:2012, 234
258Kopciński:1997, 12
259ibid

52
The festive tone, the mention of the sky and the ancient Greek words evoke a fairground and a Greek amphitheater – both large, outdoor, open spaces. This linguistic vastness is juxtaposed with the miniature, confined setting of this “monodrama for ten fingers”, which is an old box filled with small household objects (i.e. a hanger, a cup), surrounded by an audience tightly packed in a crowded, windowless room. This way, the performance is a hybrid and a paradox from the very onset. At the same time, the appeals to the goddess Hecate and the Sibyls, accompanied with the appearance of solemnly dressed fingers (the author's) lend the opening of the performance an eerie, ritualistic feel. Note further that the costumes are “Rembrandt-style”, in other words – 17th century Dutch. This costume detail, combined with the already contrasting set and text, further heightens the atemporality of the performance. The effect is at once humorous and unsettling, disorienting.

The two juxtaposing spaces – the vast amphitheater and the crowded apartment – are what, much later, in 2006, will be defined as the spaces for a post-dramatic theatre. In his seminal work defining what is now commonly known as postdramatic theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann writes:

In general it can be said that dramatic theatre has to prefer a 'medium' space. Tendentially dangerous to drama are the huge space and the very intimate space. In both cases, the structure of the mirroring is jeopardized. For the stage frame functions like a mirror that ideally allows a homogenous world of the viewers to recognize itself in the equally coherent world of the drama. A theatre, on the contrary, in which not the transmission of sign and signal but what Grotowsky called 'the proximity of living organisms' dominates perception, runs counter to the distance and abstraction essential to drama. If one reduces the distance between performers and spectators to such an extent that the physical and physiological proximity (breath, sweat, panting, movement of the musculature, cramp, gaze) masks the mental signification, then a space of a tense centripetal dynamic develops, in which theatre becomes a moment of shared energies instead of transmitted signs.261

In other words, the allegedly remarkable atmosphere that audiences of apartment theaters recall with such fondness and cite as the reason why they went back for more, is the result of this centripetal dynamic. This would also explain the need for ambiguity, which for Białoszewski was a deliberate concern, especially linguistic ambiguity. In this sense, he sought to remove or muddle theatrical signs (speech, prop, set, character) by lending ambiguity to each of those elements. Lehmann describes this as aesthetics of undecidability. This way, the experience became theatre of energies shared among those present and not available to those on the outside, making it a deterritorialized space in a sense of something that lies outside of the system, not going with it, not going against it. In cognitive terms, we can talk about the alterations to the blends which produce an imaginary space available only to the participants – it is a similar process in regular theatre, but here the space altered is not one traditionally assigned (i.e. theatre building), but an everyday home.


260Białoszewski:1971, 19
261Lehmann:2006, 150
We now move from Poland to former Czechoslovakia to address a project based in the Czech city of Brno. *Šlépěj v okně* was a title for a series of theatrical and poetic evenings that took place in a Brno apartment between 1973 and 1975, under the subtitle “performances of work by friends in the apartment of Jiří Frištáuf.” The evenings took place at Veveří 54, in a first-floor apartment belonging to the parents of one of the organizers, Jiří Frištáuf. Organized by three Moravian poets, led by Jiří Kuběna, the series ran for six sessions and fell apart after attracting the attention of the State Security (StB). While the Theatre on Tarczyńska can be examined as an example of a heterotopia created out of incongruity between the apartment space and the performative activity, *Šlépěj v okně* is a building block in the deterritorialized personal mythology of its organizers, especially Kuběna.

In the Introduction and earlier in this chapter, I explained the difference between narrative and non-narrative identity. I also discussed how identity relates to and is continually reinforced by the domestic space. I outlined cognitive scientist Mark Turner’s approach to identity as a compression of a large amount of data and how this compression has a tendency to smooth over paradoxes and erase inconsistencies, resulting in a neat narrative of our personalities. However, the paradoxes do not necessarily go away – and to this end, I quoted Gilles Deleuze, who divided reality into two lines: a narrative history and a “molecular flow.” I further introduced Václav Cílek’s understanding of *inscape* as an inner world in constant interplay with the outside environment and defined the gray zone, or an “alternative universe that existed beyond the official sphere” in 1970s Czechoslovakia. These notions will be useful now, as we examine the Brno project.

The instigator of the project, or as Jiří Frištáuf called him, “the impresario,” was Jiří Kuběna, whose personality – narrative or not – did not fit neatly into the narratives of the 1970s Czechoslovak system. In discussion of his youth, Kuběna is a self-defined outsider. Despite searching for a role model, the young poet “… did not bow down anywhere, did not suck up – what’s most important: was not in the least willing to adapt his views, his way of writing, his understanding of Eros, religion, poetry to anyone else’s.” As a result of his unwillingness to compromise, Kuběna was not officially published until the 1989 revolution, and the general attitude of the accepted art world towards him was far from friendly. For instance, when discussing the rare presentation of his poetry in Brno’s Centre for the Arts (Dům umění) in the early 1950s, the poet admits that he and his friends were “more like intruders … secret conspirators.”

*Šlépěj v okně* as an apartment theatre can be seen as a direct outcome of the peculiarity of Kuběna’s person, who remains – in more than one way – a personification of a heterotopia (a space of otherness contained within one individual). The poet’s identity is less a clash of irreconcilable paradoxes than a swirl of opposites into one fluid otherness. Born in Prague but raised in Moravia, rejected by the...

262Jiří Kuběna (b. 1936) is a Moravian poet and art historian, a representative of the so-called generation of thirty-sixes (*generace šestatřicátí*) or those born in 1936. The group included, among others, Václav Havel, Pavel Švanda, Viola Fischerová and Věra Linhartová.

263Petr: 1996, 64
264J. Kuběna in Petr: 1996
265Petr: 1996, 49
266Petr: 1996, 48
267“spiše jako vetřelci, Plaváčkové, tajni spiklenci” (Petr: 1996, 49)

Plaváček is the main character in a Czech fairy tale *Tři zlaté vlasy děda Vševěda* [Three Golden Hairs of the All-Knowing Elder] written by Karel Jaromír Erben at the end of 19th century. Plaváček's Fairy Godmother predicts that he will marry a princess despite his humble birth. This news, of course, reaches the King who spends the entire fairy tale trying to do away with the poor lad, only to give up and let him marry the princess at end anyway. As used by Kuběna, Plaváček's name evokes an atmosphere of “official art's” disdain and nonacceptance of the young poets. Kuběna's choice of this particular character is also curious when we take into account the poet's obsession with liquids and fluidity – Plaváček was so named because, Moses-like, he was sent afloat a river in a basket. The name can be loosely translated as “little swimmer.”
official literary milieu until the Velvet Revolution, active in Moravian Samizdat but – in his own words – decidedly not a dissident, Kuběna seems to exist between two worlds. He defines problems of continuity, fluidity and finding a place of belonging as major themes of concern in his work; he also gives importance to his astrological sign – Gemini, or the twins. 

In his work on deterritorialization, Yurchak devotes an entire chapter to such “deterritorialized” lifestyles. As an example, Yurchak gives us the poet Joseph Brodsky, who “… did not go against the regime …” but simply “… did not notice it.” Although it would not be entirely true to assign to Kuběna the same level of remote non-involvement as one would to Brodsky, it is safe to say that the Moravian poet’s personal narrative and his work are closely tied to the private, non-definable and non-narrative aspects of existence. Since a deterritorialized lifestyle rejects conventional identity markers, a unique personal mythology is required to take their place. In Kuběna’s case, this mythology had a deeply mystical feel – what he called being “at home in an ancient sense.” At the same time, it was a mythology of private spaces and encounters. This combination of the ancient and the everyday endowed the latter with a certain magic for Kuběna, and an apartment could become a heterotopia, rendered as such by what Kuběna considered to be mythological forces within.

Domestic spaces were assigned an important place in Kuběna’s personal mythology. Alongside fluidity and outsider status, homes (belonging to him and others) receive a status of identity markers in Kuběna’s memory. We see this in the way he uses rooms and spaces to formulate key memories, in the way he identifies his roots and finally, in the way it is reflected in his work – including the Šlépěj v okně project. For instance, in a 2006 interview with the young poet Pavel Petr, Kuběna repeatedly frames his memories by describing apartments and houses. The interview begins with Kuběna’s recollection of two early, key memories: his Prague origins and his first meeting with Václav Havel, who was then only an aspiring teenage writer wholly unaware of his future role as the first president of the independent Czechoslovakia. Both accounts are nested, for the poet’s memory, in detailed descriptions of homes – the street, the building number, the floor and which room was where in the apartment. For example, here is how the poet replies to a question about his return to Prague (his birthplace) in the 1950s, after having spent his youth in Moravia:

For me, very soon, actually from the very beginning, there appeared a very specific nostalgia for Prague, to be precise for my beloved Hancpaulka, street Nad Šarkou, garden and house number 34 (č.p. 753), especially for the apartment in its second and third – attic – floors …

269See Yurchak:2016, 255
270Yurchak is quoting the writer Sergei Dovlatov’s notes on Brodsky: “Он не боролся с режимом. Он его не замечал.” (Юрчак:2016, 256)
271Petr:1996, 46
272 ibid
273Číslo popisné – an identification number given to Czech buildings in addition to the street number. Officially recognized in 1770, the numbers indicate where the structure is listed in the city records and is typically found on a red plaque under or next to the street number. Although the majority of Prague citizens today will not tell you this number when asked for their address, children pre-revolution were taught to remember both the house and the identification number. Here, neither number is particularly important for the conversation, which indicates the significance of them to the poet – he deems it necessary to recite his entire address, i.e. number included because it is a sequence he learned in the earliest childhood and repeating it unlocks a set of memories.
When discussing Havel, Kuběna says: “[T]he first time I saw Václav Havel was in a so-called ‘nest,’ a back room in his parents’ apartment, on the fourth floor of the house number 2000 on Engels Quay.” The year was 1953 and both Kuběna and Havel were 17 years old. Just as he does with Havel, Kuběna connects memories of other members of his poetic group through details of their homes – for instance, the writer and translator Marie-Louise Langrová, who was a friend “at whose place there were romantic gatherings with candles and where people fell in love with each other”; the artist Vera Fridrichová, whose influence was tremendous on Kuběna and who invited him to her “legendary studio on Česká street 13, on the top floor (from which one could see ... the tower of St. Jakub’s Cathedral)”; and the country home of Václav Havel’s parents, where a 17-year-old Kuběna escaped the “nervous atmosphere after Stalin’s death.”

In Kuběna’s musings, the positive recollections of private places and faces are juxtaposed with official places – the university, the aforementioned Dům umění in Brno. Life in apartments, studios and houses (and the people who inhabited them) formed Kuběna’s world-view much more than formal institutions. Everything important happened in private. Describing Soviet communal apartments, Svetlana Boym notes the “contrast between the official, cold collectivity and the sincerity and hospitality of the ‘own’.” Although the Czech living conditions, even in the 1950s, compared favorably to the Soviet communal apartment, we can extend the notion of this contrast to explain the peculiarity of Kuběna’s “belonging.” Indeed, the not-entirely-translatable notion of “svoih” or “one’s own” (своих) evokes at once a cozy reality of a small private world and a chilly vastness of everything that is not “ours.” Russian – and, indeed, Czech – goes as far as to define the shape which these close people form in our lives: a circle. As is evident later on, a circle is also the perfect shape in pataphysics (Ch. 3), and earlier in this chapter, I noted how perfect enclosure is important to Roland Barthes’ cubby hole. In other words, a home refers as much to people and a conceptual wholeness as to a specific place. “Svoi,” and this does not escape Boym’s attention, are not just found on the street –they are safely contained in an apartment, in a warm and cozy room. Seen in light of this observation, Kuběna’s “ancient sense” of belonging seems less of a riddle – it is not belonging to a country or a political party, but belonging to a clan, fitting into a friendly circle.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed in some detail the relationship between the non-narrative self and the home. More specifically, I focused on the importance of ambiguous, non-narrative details in identity construction. Šlépěj v okně – a project as definitive for Kuběna’s artistic career as his poetry – was an example of such ambiguity, which entered a home of a friend and elevated Kuběna’s circle to a mythical status through alienation. Šlépěj v okně was inspired by an apartment of a friend. In the interviews collected by Petr, Jiří Kuběna is credited with initiating the idea along with another Moravian poet, Jaroslav Fríč. In Kuběna’s words, the project came about in the Fall of 1973, during a period of the poet’s eight-year-long artistic hiatus and when Frištauf presented an opportunity to do something in his parents’ apartment. According to Taussiková, Kuběna was excited by Frištauf’s...

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275 Pelech is literally translated as “den”


277 “…u které se romanticky sedávalo večer při svičkách a kde se lidé do sebe zamílovali…” (ibid)

278 Petr:1996, 47

279 ibid

280 “…kontраст между официальной холодной коллективностью и душевностью и гостеприимством в кругу ‘своих’.” (Бойм:2002, 178)

281 Petr:1996
spacious Art Nouveau home, where all the rooms could be connected to make one large space. According to Kuběna’s recollections, the name was prompted by an unexplained appearance of a bare footprint on the outside of the window glass. Taussiková further specifies that the footprint belonged to a child, and the window was five meters off the ground (although Kuběna estimates seven). It was winter. Kuběna also explains that, beyond immortalizing the mystical footprint, the name carried poetical connotations — on the one hand a “…somewhat futuristic character, something like Mayakovsky’s poem Cloud in Pants…” and on the other “…most importantly there was a Demlian reminiscence – Footprints, for us, similarly to Deml, it was about resonance, continuity, connection.” Šlépěj v okně thus began with a myth, with the unfamiliar and the strange literally entering the domestic space.

The format of these evenings presented a hybrid of poetic readings and short theatrical skits. For the latter, Kuběna prepared paper masks (Fig.2.7). These are stylized faces and look as though the author intended to make tribal masks for his own small clan. They are also reminiscent of the Green Man (Fig.2.8), a figure in Bohemian mythology that Cilek traces at least to the 1300s. The function of the Green Man remains vague – the best explanation is that he is a keeper of the woods – but he appears in cathedral constriction across what is now the Czech Republic with apparent regularity. Cilek connects this figure to similar characters in other mythologies, such as Jack in the Green, and writes that from him and similar beings comes “imaginary culture,” which is a necessary element in religion that takes belief beyond direct prayer and adds a new dimension to it. Gothic elements of one of Kuběna’s masks suggests that the comparison of these objects to the Green Man is more than accidental. Interpreted in this light, Kuběna’s masks evoke an ancient mythological being, traditionally an element of Gothic cathedral architecture, into a home of his friend. In this way, the apartment becomes a cave, where a circle of one’s own meets around a fire to encounter a mythical and powerful being. The apartment, through this ritual, is now deterritorialized and replaced with an imaginary space of the author’s making.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, I cited Bachelard’s description of a house as something imagined and Lefebvre's notion of the domestic space as a complex, imaginary one. I connected these thoughts to Cilek's concept of internal landscape (inscape) and Turner's views on how the domestic space weaves into the cognitive network of a human self – an idea intuited much earlier (prior to and independently

282Art Noveau or Secese in Czech (end of 19th – early 20th century) buildings are found in Prague and Brno along with many other European cities and are known for their spacious dwellings. Kuběna – and, we shall later see, the Polish artists of Theatre on Tarczyńska and Teatr Osobny, were inspired to create theatre in such apartments, claiming to see something theatrical in them. In fact, this notion is probably not accidental, given the fact that one of the chief aims of Art Nouveau architecture was to combine art with everyday life. In case of apartment theatres mentioned in this study, the architectural experiment of Art Nouveau can be considered a success.

283“...asijsko-ruský – trochu futuristický charakter něco jako Majakovského poéma Oblak v kalhotech...” (Petr:1996)

284Jakub Deml (1978 – 1961) was a Czech writer, poet and a Catholic priest. His work is considered to be an example of Surrealism. Kuběna lists Deml, along with another Czech surrealist Vítězslav Nezval, as one of his primary poetic influences. Deml's Šlépěje (Footprints) was an irregular series of samizdat (self-published) journals collecting his thoughts, criticisms, responses to critics and friends as well as stories from his life.

285“...hlavně tam zaznivala ta reminiscence demlovská – Šlépěje, podobně jako Demlovi i nám šlo o resonanci, kontinuitu, sousedlost.” (Petr:1996)

286Here and below: Taussiková in Petr:1996, 46 -47

287Cilek:2010, 154
of Turner) by Lefebvre. I illustrated how the urban apartment, in general terms and in the Soviet context, presents an intricate synthesis of political, cultural and cognitive impulses reflected in literature, theatre and film. Finally, I discussed case studies of projects that took place in apartments.

Here, I would like to address how to interpret the interjection of my case studies into the imagined domestic space. What and how did these projects create by introducing new elements into the cognitive blend of the apartment? Earlier in this study, I introduced the notion of imaginary worlds. I propose that J.P. Wolf's ideas on what constitutes an imaginary world overlap with both Yurchak's concept of vnenahodimost and Foucault's heterotopia, in more ways than one. I further propose that an understanding of projects such as Theatre on Tarczyńska lies at the intersection of these three notions.

Imaginary worlds are a wide category and so share a long list of characteristics. For this chapter, it is important to address two: the presence of a foundational reality and the aspect of interaction. Many of the imaginary (Secondary) worlds exist in a relationship to the real (Primary) world, which they frequently invert. In addition, some secondary worlds are interactive – in other words, they exist because they are shared by a group and, consequently, referred to as participatory worlds. Below, I examine Theatre on Tarczyńska, Teatr Osobny and Šlépěj v Okně in the context of imaginary worlds theory in regards to a Primary world and participatory elements, respectively.

When it comes to their relationship to location, I propose that the apartment can be considered a primary world. Apartment projects could not exists without the domestic space, which they change and invert. In relation to location, apartment performances present a paradox within a paradox: the first of the paradoxes being the act of public performance within a space intended for private life; the second paradox being the hybrid of ritual (repeatable, formalized, reassuring) and ambiguity, both linguistic and material (malleable, uncertain, flexible, unsettling). In a larger sense, both of these paradoxes confront structured and rehearsed cultural performance – theatrical and ritualistic – with the flux of everyday life. This confrontation produces spatial/temporal ripples resulting in a deterritorializing effect. Another way to put this would be to look at apartment projects through the prism of Lefebvre's triad in combination with imaginary world theories. Projects like Theatre on Tarczyńska not only used the physical characteristics of an apartment but also the socialist ideals of a communal, shared space and built on them to create something else. In this way, they played off both the physical and the mental aspects of space, as defined by Lefebvre, to create an alternate social space at the site of the original. From this point of view, the projects can also be seen as what Wolf calls overlaid worlds. An overlaid world, in Gerard Hynes' definition, occurs when a “location may still be considered part of the Primary World” because “the level of difference from the Primary World is sufficiently small.” In other words, an overlaid world is one that is grounded in physical reality, such as an apartment, but is “sufficiently defamiliarized and altered to count” as a secondary world, such as when household objects are converted into theatre benches and abstract props. I propose that the double inversion of the physical (apartment) and mental (private site) spaces allowed for the level of defamiliarization necessary to create a separate “experiential realm,” which is another definition of an imaginary world by Hynes.

Wolf's et al definition of imaginary worlds includes one that sees them as participatory spaces that, while fictional, are integrally connected to physical reality. In fact, Wolf uses children's play as an example to illustrate the concept. A child's play is not just a form of entertainment, but it is also a way of learning and creating a different reality that is connected to the child's everyday life. The examples of ap
example of a participatory or interactive imaginary world in the similar vein as Foucault, whom I discuss below. In his essay on participatory imaginary worlds Matthew Freeman examines “the practice of producing and engaging with imaginary worlds that are interactive or participatory in nature...” Freeman relies on the definition of participatory culture originally provided by Henry Jenkins and writes that “participatory culture is characterized by particular ideals” which include, in Jenkins' words, “strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others” and the members' belief in “some degree of social connection with one another...” All the projects I described above, beyond having an audience, contained a set of ritualized behaviors to which the audience members were expected to subscribe – this included the already-mentioned invitation cards in Theatre on Tarczyńska or the ritualistic masks in Kuběn's performances. Ritualization is hinted at in Białoszewski's nods to Greek theatre, while Kuběna's project is founded on a shared mythology of the mysterious footprint. Additionally, group dynamic has been remarked as of paramount importance by the participants of all three projects.

To what extent are these worlds heterotopias?

In his treatise on heterotopias, Foucault wrote: “Bachelard’s monumental work and the descriptions of phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well.” This aspect of the imaginary in defining a heterotopia follows Foucault from his earliest description of the term. Peter Johnson cites Foucault's radio broadcast, writing that “his opening illustrations of the concept refer to various children’s imaginative games, mentioning tents and dens in gardens as well as all the games played on or under the covers of the parents’ bed. The children’s inventive play produces a different space that at the same time mirrors what is around them. The space reflects and contests simultaneously.” At the same time, in Foucault's understanding, “heterotopias are always real” and “do not exist independently of our existence or our ways of knowing.” In this sense, apartment performances can be interpreted as heterotopias because there is a paradox hidden within the idea of a private performance event. This paradox is at once reminiscent of Foucault's mirror heterotopia (“I see myself, where I am not...”) and the imaginary worlds' propensity at inverting or juxtaposing themselves to a familiar reality. Both interpretations offer a glimpse into the alienating mechanisms of apartment theaters. This alienation and the subsequent renewed understanding of the familiar allow to interpret my case studies as imaginary worlds that are heterotopical. In other words, if a heterotopia reinterprets the site of the real by reconfiguring its elements, then Theatre on Tarczyńska, Separate Theatre and Footprint on the Window are heterotopias because they alienate their physical environment to produce a counter-site to the original location. To be more specific, for instance, Theatre on Tarczyńska used the architectural elements of Stefański's home as a theatre stage to make a hybrid place, neither private or public (or both at once).

How do these projects relate to Yurchak's *vnenahodimost*?

I have already mentioned *inversion* as a key characteristic of apartment projects. So far, I have mostly discussed the inversion of the physical space – the apartment, which became a theatre, in other words, a

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292 Freeman in Wolf:2018, 198
293 ibid
294 Jenkins quoted by Freeman in Wolf:2018, 198
295 Foucault:1984, 2
296 Johnson:2006, 76
297 Topinka:2010, 4

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private location used as a public venue. However, inversion also occurred on the level of what Lefebvre called mental level, which I mentioned earlier. Rather than inverting the material plane, this second inversion was integrally linked to the socio-historical context of the project participants. This happened in two ways: one, the participants adopted socialist ideals of communality but endowed them with their own meaning; and two – the participants turned on its head the imaginary Soviet apartment as popularly depicted in films and paintings, i.e. a spacious, sunny and straightforward imaginary space was turned on its head into a darkened, stuffy and complex. These two inversions correspond to Yurchak's definition of deterritorialized spaces because they relied on forms provided by the system (communal shared space, imaginary apartment in soc realism) but endowed them with their own meanings. Therefore, projects such as Theatre on Tarczyńska or Footprint on the Window can be interpreted as deterritorialized, however with a certain nuance. Considering Wolf's imaginary worlds, my case studies begin to resemble micro-versions of Yurchak's Imaginary West and so, again, can be seen micro-worlds. However, a thorough discussion on whether my case studies constitute separate imaginary worlds in the context of Yurchak's vnenahodimost requires an overview of the remaining case study, which did not take place in apartments and is a type of place defined, in Czech scholarship, as strange places. This I turn to in the following chapter before drawing final conclusions.

Chapter 3. Strange Places and The Science of Imaginary Solutions

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter deals with a series of performative interjections at a variety of non-domestic locations, all arranged by a Czechoslovak collective called The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate (1980-86). I approach these events using Alexei Yurchak's thoughts on certain nuances of vnenahodimost in combination with the notions of strange places (Heczková, Svatoňová) and the informal public (Zdravomyslova, Voronkov).

The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate was founded by the Czech personality Eduard Vácek on the principles of Alfred Jarry's invented pseudoscience of pataphysics and a long-standing Czech tradition of grotesque. At first glance, the activities of the group resemble Czech Action Art or Happenings of Tadeusz Kantor. However, the members of the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate did not consider their efforts to be art. Rather, they positioned themselves as adherents to a pataphysical doctrine and their events as attempts to materialize the principles of pataphysics in real life. In this way, as I discuss below, they can be likened to what Yurchak calls “deterritorialized lifestyles.” However, in contrast to Yurchak's examples, the members of Vácek's collective led regular lives outside of the pataphysical acts. I propose that their events can rather be interpreted as temporally limited strange places, a notion similar to a heterotopia, and examine how the group applied what Yurchak calls the irony of vnenahodimost to various tensions in “normalized” Czech space to compose an imaginary “pataphysical” reality.

This chapter is somewhat different from the previous ones: it is shorter, consisting of only one case study and focuses on former Czechoslovakia only. It also leans more heavily on fieldwork in addition to existing historical sources. The fieldwork in this case consisted of personal meetings with the various members of the Libri Prohibiti (Library of Banned Books) in Prague and archival research at this library, resulting in an interview with the founder of The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate, Eduard Vácek. This interview, transcribed and translated, supplements this chapter as an Appendix and is included at the end of this study.
3.2 Strange Places

Czech scholars Libuše Heczková and Kateřina Svatoňová introduce the concept of “strange places” in their contribution to the collection of essays *Culture and Totality IV – the Everyday.* To formulate their concept, the authors build on Viktor Shklovsky’s notion of defamiliarization, which to him meant a technique of altering the perception of an audience, to formulate their concept. Heczková and Svatoňová define strange places as “various types of displacement” or “changes in the viewpoint” that can occur as a result of both deliberate activity and changes in circumstance. According to this definition, strange places can appear “at different levels of cultural processes and artistic expressions – for example, in the field of artistic genres, topography, language, thinking, imaging of institutional practices.” The historians point out that the appearance of these places is closely linked to totalitarian societies or “normalized” everyday conditions. This definition also distinguishes strange places from non-places, a term coined by Marc Augé that denotes transitory spaces where people gain a state of anonymity, such as hotel rooms or highways. Heczková and Svatoňová write that, in contrast to non-places, which draw a blank on tradition and identity, “strange places are spaces in which the various traditions overlap, the places overlaid with ‘strange’ meanings, at first glance perhaps invisible.”

Their elaboration on the paradoxical relationship between strange places and the dominant system within which they tend to occur is closely reminiscent of Alexei Yurchak’s places of vnenaходимост or deterritorialization, which I discussed in detail in earlier chapters. Similar to Yurchak’s concept, strange places “often become a paradoxical knot in which an official, unofficial, and forbidden culture encounters where forbidden is allowed, restrictions are loosened, and official outputs can carry unintended connotations.” In addition to Yurchak’s notion of a place existing in parallel to the dominant system, Heczková and Svatoňová also stress the flexibility of such spaces, concluding that “[s]trange places can be understood as activities and spaces, which are accompanied by the necessity of adaptation and adaptability ...” In a way, a strange place is akin to a Brechtian concept of *estrangement*, although the Shklovskian notion predates Brecht, and strange places, in an important difference to Brechtian political energies, stem from a need to remove oneself from a politically active role or, indeed, the prevalent socio-political system. In the context of this study, strange places are closely related to the heterotopical and deterritorialized spaces discussed in previous chapters, and they represent another, specifically Czech, way to address similar phenomena.

Non-domestic strange places can be loosely categorized into urban (occurring in cafes or in public transit) and rural (occurring in forests or at cottages). At the same time, they can be examined by the type of movement: for instance, the wave of Czech Action Art encompassed both urban and rural settings; the Czech “islands of freedom” primarily focused on cottages and form an example of the role that *dacha* as a second home played in socialist society, not only in Czechoslovakia but also in

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298Kultura a totalita IV – Každodennost (2016, Ivan Klimeš, Jan Wiendl eds.)
299Heczková and Svatoňová use the Russian word – *ostranenie* – which Shklovky introduced it in 1916 and is translated into Czech as *ozvláštnění/defamiliarizace* or a weirdening/defamiliarization.
300Libuše Heczková, Kateřina Svatoňová:2016, 326
301Heczková, Svatoňová:2016, 326
302Augé, Marc. *Non-lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Le Seuil:1992)
303Heczková, Svatoňová:2016, 326
304ibid
305ibid
306Morganová:2015
307Stárek:2010
308Schindler-Wisten:2017

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Poland and the Soviet Union; and Białoszewski experimented both with rural performance in his 1940s Forest Theatre and with urban deterritorialization during his nighttime city walks, for which he was well-known and which positioned him as a sort of inverted, nocturnal flaneur.

As Heczková and Svatoňová point out, a strange place can be a location or an action. In other words, it can be a place that has been permanently designated as strange, similar to how cemeteries or theaters are heterotopias to Foucault, or can become temporarily strange via an activity, the way Stefański's apartment did during a performance. In the first case, simply walking into or standing at such a place afforded a participant a degree of deterritorialization because the location somehow bypassed or inverted everyday reality. In the second second case, effort would be made by one or more individuals to deterritorialize a location by inverting or otherwise altering the spatial relationships within it. The location would then remain deterritorialized for the duration of the action, but would cease to be such after the action was over and the relationships within the location would be restored.

Permanently strange places in the Normalization-period Czechoslovak context have been categorized by the Czech Underground activist František Stárek. He calls them spaces for free youth and catalogues them into four groups. According to Stárek, these were specific pubs, certain street spaces, so-called “open apartments” and workplaces that allowed for living at the location of work. I briefly elaborate on each of Stárek's categories here:

1) Pubs – much like Leningrad’s legendary Cafe Saigon or Prague’s famous Cafe Slavia, where Václav Havel would meet with other dissidents, pubs were informal gathering places. However, they were different than the well-known dissident cafes. These places, though still officially licensed bars, had a rougher edge to them and were not so much teeming with internationally known intellectuals and StB agents trying to spy on them, as they were with hordes of rowdy, long-haired youths. Some examples of these watering holes in Prague were Na Klamovce, Deminka, U parapliček and many others not only in Prague but also in Teplice, Plzen and Brno, among other areas.

2) The “outside” – this term represents a set of outdoor urban locations that were informally known as meeting points around the city. In Prague, these were the steps in front of the National Museum or the atrium of the Time movie theatre.

3) Open apartments were, as the name suggests, apartment spaces that were openly available for entrance. One of the first such places was Milan Knížák’s home in the center of Prague.

4) The last category of strange places occurred when a place of employment allowed for the person to live on site. Such places were, for instance, the boiler rooms I addressed in Chapter 1.

When it comes to temporally limited strange places, simple, everyday actions were frequently used. An example can be seen in the work of the Aktual collective. Aktual was a Czech action art movement, founded by artist and performer Milan Knížák (1940–). Knížák’s aim was to blur or dissolve the boundary between art and life. The resulting body of performances and the first manifesto of Aktual

309 Sulima:2000
310 Вечин et al: http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/cfm/essays.cfm?ClipID=382&TourID=900
311 Kirchner:1996
312 Tetno pod Tynkiem, by various authors is a book devoted to Białoszewski’s private topography, University of Warsaw: 2013
313 Stárek:2010, 9-10
Art (1964) were hybrids of ritualized and everyday actions. According to Czech art historian Pavlina Morganová, Aktual’s projects at the time were intended to “… strengthen human solidarity and do away with lethargy …” 14 The action that the group used to achieve these aims ranged from the straightforward, such as shaking hands, to those requiring more effort. For instance, Knižák invited his followers to “[s]et up a table in front of your home and have lunch. Invite anyone who passes by to join.” 15 Aktual’s manifesto clearly stated that their focus was to be on “… simple anonymous activity. Walks, lunches, excursions, games, festivities, taking the tram, shopping, conversations, sports, fashion shows, etc. … just a little different. Spontaneous street rituals.” 16 In 1966, Knižák was joined by Robert Wittmann, who “… drew attention to himself with the action Exhibition of Street Reality (Výstava skutečnosti ulice, 1966) ... In this action Wittmann hung empty picture frames along a street as to present scenes from life itself: cobblestone, a chipped wall or random passerby. He was also publishing and distributing various sets of instructions at this time such as: ‘Open a window and listen undisturbed to the piece composed by life’.” 17 Sometimes, Wittmann handed tiny pieces of paper to people on the streets. The piece of paper would carry messages such as “[n]otice the changing pictures when looking at the ground as you walk.” 18

Along with urban activities, we can also observe a wave of strange places occurring outside of cities. This tendency was, on the one hand, rooted in the perceived neutrality of nature as compared to the ideologically complex urban centers and, on the other, had to do with the resulting increase of privacy and looser control of rural areas. As Utekhin notes, “[t]he closer to the centre, the tighter the control,” 19 meaning that high-rise neighborhoods on the outskirts of cities or rural areas were less strategically important and therefore less monitored. Indeed, while a place such as a busy boulevard in central Prague or Warsaw would certainly be tightly controlled, the further one moved away, the more ambiguous certain rules became. This rule applied not only to the cities but to entire regions, meaning that the further one got from the capital (or a large city), the less likely he or she was to be monitored or arrested. Many artists took advantage of this fact, making the most out of their dachas and chatas or conducting artistic experiments in nature or among the gritty labyrinths of high-rise neighborhoods.

Here, however, simple actions remain a focal point, for example the actions of Miloš Šejn, whose performances consisted of walking alone through a forest or sleeping in a pile of leaves (both 1969). 20 At the same time, colonies that Stárek calls “islands of freedom”, which I mentioned previously, frequently sprung up during the 1960s and 70s in rural dachas. These could be vaguely compared to the American hippie communes and, indeed, were modeled after them to a certain extent. Stárek conducted an extensive series of interviews with former members of these groups, categorizing them by location (see above). Ritualized performance, containing many hybrid elements, was a stable component of these gatherings, accompanied by large doses of irony and alcohol. Marie Benetková, who is one of the people interviewed by František Stárek for his collection of memoirs, recalled an invitation to a private theatre festival from one of the neighboring farms. To prepare for this festival, Benetková and her partner created a performance called That Little Red Skirt, 21 which consisted of four acts: Grandpa Dies, Birth, Wedding and Plague Wound. 22 The performers were costumed in a variety of outfits ranging from a white cloak and a laurel wreath (the character of the

314 Morganová:2015, 70
315 ibid
316 Morganová:2015, 65
317 ibid
318 Morganová:2015, 68
319 “Чем ближе к центру, тем строже контроль.” (Утехин:2012, 19)
320 Morganová:2015, 126-127
321 Tu červenou sukýnkę
322 Dědeček umírá, Porod, Svatba, Morová rána

63
Bride/Magician/Doctor/Announcer) to a “purple denim suit from Poland” (the character of the Executioner). The acts played out in a yard, in the middle of a circle of spectators. The front row of the audience was taken up by so-called “Computer Sons,” whose job was to ignore the performance and discuss computers the entire time. By way of musical accompaniment, the performers sang Czech folk songs save for a brief episode in Act 4, where the Dying Swan from Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake was heard. Benetková’s concluding note on the performance states, “[w]e were not understood.” This comment suggests that the point of the activity was not to share a cohesive narrative or impart clear meaning. Rather, the creators of That Little Red Skirt aimed to deterritorialize and hence free the shared space of performance for the duration of the activity.


The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate is an independent group of artists and intellectuals founded by the Czech writer and chief pataphysician, Eduard Váček (Fig. 3.1). Founded in 1980, the group was forced to stop its activities after Váček's arrest and imprisonment in 1986; however, it later resumed meetings and is informally active to this day. In many ways, Váček's collective carved out a place of vnenahodimost for itself. However, a full discussion of the Teplice project would not be possible without first discussing pataphysics and its significance in a wider Czech context. Therefore, this section of the chapter explains pataphysics and then illustrates how Váček and his collaborators relied on pataphysical principles to construct deterritorialized or strange spaces. Overall, Váček's project is a strong example of what Alexei Yurchak calls “the irony of vnenahodimost,” a specific quality of deterritorialization that I discuss in more detail below.

Pataphysics is a pseudoscience and a philosophy that was invented at the turn of the 20th century by the French playwright and enfant terrible, author of the scandalous Ubu Roi, Alfred Jarry (1873–1907). The official document on pataphysics, published posthumously in 1923, is Jarry’s novel Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician, although clues as to the nature of pataphysics appear in other works by Jarry, such as his play Caesar-Antichrist (1895). According to Jarry’s biographer, Alastair Brotchie, Jarry brought the term “pataphysics” with him to Paris from boarding school. This imaginary concept historically enjoyed some real success, with the first Pataphysics Collegiate being established in Paris in 1948. The first definition of the term, as written in Faustroll, appears in the original edition highlighted in italics and preceded by the capitalized word “DEFINITION.” Pataphysics itself is explained as “... the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attribute the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments.” In other words, pataphysics concerns itself with imaginary realms that go beyond physics and metaphysics. Later on, Jarry expanded this definition, describing pataphysics as “[a]n epiphenomenon” – something that “is superimposed upon a phenomenon.” These descriptions place pataphysics in the same realm as heterotopias and strange places – that is, a set of notions concerning imaginary spaces and parallel

323Benetková in Stárek:2010, 70-73
324Borecký, Kopač
325Ubu Roi or is a, 1896 puppet play set in a fictional kingdom of Poland (which was absent from the maps of Europe at the time). The play scandalized Parisian audiences during its opening by being the first instance of an (almost) curse word being uttered on stage (in this case, merdre! [shit] – see earlier in this study)
326Brotchie:2011
327Brotchie:1995, 11
328Jarry:1911, 5
329“La pataphysique est la science des solutions imaginaires, qui accorde symboliquement aux lineaments les proprietes ses objets decrits par leur virtualite.” (Jarry:1911, 22).
330Brotchie:2011, 29
Jarry’s invention of pataphysics has rich philosophical roots. Brotchie notes that, “[b]iographically speaking, Pataphysics may be considered as the epiphenomenon of Jarry’s attending the class of ... Henri Bergson” and elsewhere adds that “[t]he most immediate effect of Bergson’s teaching ... was to provide the philosophical underpinnings for the young Jarry’s initial formulations of Pataphysics.”

Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941) was a well-known French philosopher and Nobel-prize winner, active in the first half of the 20th century. Bergson emphasized intuitive knowledge and direct experience as more important than rational thought. Prior to becoming a person of wide importance, Bergson taught history of philosophy at the Lycee Henri IV in Paris, where Jarry was a student. According to Brotchie, Jarry joined Bergon’s class in 1891, at the age of 18. This was a class that Bergson “endowed ... with a personal slant, and his course commenced with the epistemological problems posed by the interaction of mind and matter. Otherwise, this course of Bergson’s appears to have been quite as peculiar as his own philosophy; it traveled down all sorts of forgotten paths and eccentric dead ends in the history of ideas, and any number of unusual theories were explored.”

Brotchie notes that “[i]deas originating in Bergson’s course would influence much of Jarry’s future writing.”

One of the defining characteristics of pataphysics is the deeply two-faced nature of the concept. Jarry’s sense of humor, combined with his sound philosophical background, meant that pataphysics is, at its core, somewhat of a paradox. Brotchie takes it upon himself to answer the following question: are we to approach pataphysics seriously as a philosophical standpoint or simply take it for an elaborate intellectual joke? According to Brotchie’s sources, the answer is to be found not in Faustroll (the “official” treatise on the subject), but in Jarry’s earlier work – his 1895 play Caesar-Antichrist. Brotchie quotes a character from the play: “Axiom and principle of the identity of opposites, the pataphysician, clamped to your ears and your retractable wings, flying fish, is the dwarf atop the giant, beyond metaphysics.”

Brotchie carefully traces this “principle of the identity of opposites” from Heraclitus to Coleridge to Gustav Theodor Fechner, bringing them to the table as those who, along with Bergson, made an impact on Jarry’s thought. The sum of these, in Brotchie’s view, totals Jarry’s conviction that the “... distinctions between the serious and the comic were henceforth to be considered invalid.” Instead, they present a hybrid which blends opposing principles to produce an epiphenomenon endowed with new meanings and possibilities.

However, the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate did not originate from Jarry’s work alone, but was rather built on a specifically Czech tradition of grotesque humor dating back to the Czech National Revival (the 18th and 19th centuries). Czech cultural analyst Vladimír Borecký maps a long tradition of the grotesque in Czech culture in his analysis of Jarry’s pataphysics in the Czech context. Borecký also illustrates Czech prewar artists’ extended fascination with Jarry. For instance, popular comic actor Jiří Voskovec translated Ubu Roi into Czech (published in 1930), and director Jindřich Honzl staged the play in 1928 at Prague’s Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené divadlo). In 1944, during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Honzl’s students prepared a semi-secret performance of Ubu Roi in Prague's Smetana Museum. In the period immediately following the war, the poet Josef Kainar wrote two plays inspired by Jarry’s original – these were Ubu Continues and Ubu Returns. The latter was performed in
1949 at the Theatre of Satire in Prague and was the last play running before the theatre was shut down because of censorship. Even though, as Borecký points out, neither Vosovec nor Kainar were directly interested in pataphysics, their active introduction of Jarry’s ideas to the Czech stage paved the way for other groups. Borecký notes that the establishment of Soviet power in former Czechoslovakia “led to the appearance of a series of semi-secret groups that were akin to the pataphysical standpoints of absurd comedy.”338 As examples, he cites the work of the poets Egon Bondy and Bohumil Hrabal and notes the 1961 Czech publication of Jarry’s Dr.Faustroll as a turning point for Czech pataphysics. Although a number of Pataphysical Collegiates sprung up during the second half of the 20th century, Vácek's seems to be the only one that sought the practical, real-life application of Jarry’s philosophy, and in that the experiment remains worthy of special attention. In order to gain a deeper understanding of Czech pataphysics, I met with Eduard Vácek in 2013 to discuss his views of pataphysics, his work and his imprisonment.

Duality and a combination of the incompatible have followed Eduard Vácek since early childhood. Vácek was born in 1947 in a Czech town, Hradec Králové,339 into a family with opposing (and strong) political traditions. His father came from a long line of devoted communists – indeed, according to family lore, Vácek's great-grandfather was a senator and one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Vácek's paternal grandmother was a party member and raised her son (Vácek's father) in the spirit of communist beliefs. Vácek's father left his job at a printer for a position of the Regional Secretary of the Scientific and Technical Society,340 which was a bureaucratic Party job. According to Vácek, this move was not a pragmatic career decision, but rather the result of communist fervor and unconditional trust in socialist ideals. Vácek's mother, on the other hand, was a daughter of a Czech Legionary341. Having returned from service in Russia, her father (Vácek's paternal grandfather) joined the regular police force but remained a sworn “Masarykovic”342 – a devotee of the democratic president of the First Republic, Czech politician and philosopher, T.G. Masaryk. In this way, Eduard Vácek was born into a household marked by duality, opposition and ongoing heated political debate. This is perhaps the inheritance to which Vácek refers when, reflecting on his independent views, he says, “[d]ecisive influence in this had, undoubtedly, my genetic makeup, that I inherited after my ancestors”343. Indeed, his answers to questions of concepts such as identity or freedom reveal a paradox marked with a deep, passionate belief in a universal truth that then goes curiously against the grain of the ambiguity and duality of his pataphysical convictions. Vácek himself refers to this paradox of personality: “Despite having a truly pronounced sense of truth, I also love mystification. I’m aware that this sounds like inner opposition ...”344

Eduard Vácek became interested in pataphysics around the same time that he became active in the cultural underground, publishing in the samizdat magazine Vokno, joining an informal group of poets KAT345 and exhibiting his visual work with the Terč group. Vácek first became aware of pataphysics through an article in a journal – in his case, World Literature346 – which in 1969 published a five-part

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338 Borecký:2004, 18
339 Hradec Králové is a Czech town that is known for its yearly Regional Theatre Festival and as the seat of Divadlo Drak (Dragon Theatre) – a puppet theatre founded and for many years ran by the banned-from-Prague director Josef Krofta.
340 Krajský tajemník vědecko-technické společnosti
341 Czech (or Czechoslovak) Legion
342 Masarykovic
343 “Rozhodující vliv měla bezpodmínky moje genetická výbava, kterou jsem zdědil po svých předcích.” (Vácek:2015, see Appendix A of this study)
344 “Přesto, že mám opravdu vyhraněný smysl pro pravdu, zároveň miluji mystifikaci. Uvědomuji si, že to zni jako vnitřní rozpor...” (ibid)
345 Klub Autoru Teplicka
346 Světová literatura
series on Jarry’s science and the Paris Pataphysics Collegiate. Albert Marenčin was the author of the piece, and the series was called *The Annals of Patafysics*. After meeting with Marenčin in Slovakia to find out more, Vácek returned to Teplice and began to introduce elements of pataphysics into Christian lectures, which were then popular with young Teplice intellectuals. Vácek claims to have gradually replaced the Christian content of these lectures with pataphysical teachings. According to him, this eventually resulted in talks that included only pataphysics and no Christianity, at which point, Vácek recalls, the group left the Christian center where they were meeting to pursue pataphysics openly. In this way, Vácek and his collaborators founded the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate in 1980. With time, the makeup of the group changed as various members finished school and moved on to work at orchestras or to study at universities, and others, such as Mira Vaněk, musician from the well-known Czech band *We Are Home*, photographer Petr Kuranda; and painter Václav Lukášek, joined in. Having formed, the group began carrying out (and still does) two ongoing projects: the publication of a samizdat magazine PAKO and a series of events that can be loosely described as a ritualistic performances with audience participation. Deeply ironic and satirical, these events present carefully orchestrated situations at once seemingly absurd and endued with hidden meaning. Although all the events are of a performative nature, they also carry an air of ironic scientific enquiry. As such, the activities of the group usually consist of an application of scientific or academic method of enquiry (a seminar) applied to an absurd or obscene phenomena (such as defecating).

On an unspecified date, the group boarded a city bus in the town of Dubí with the intention of carrying out an editorial meeting of their samizdat magazine PAKO on the back seats of the bus. PAKO was a collection of pataphysical articles and pictures, intended (in Vácek's words) “to ensure that [our] thoughts will not wilt and [our] spirit will not rot,” and arranging an editorial meeting on a bus was meant to involve the so-called masses in the intellectual process. However, considering the content of PAKO, the response of the “masses” was not favorable. Inspired by Jarry's taste for shocking vulgarity in combination with the tradition for grotesque, PAKO mostly consisted of a combination of philosophical ruminations, fecal humor and pornographic images. For example, the cover of a later (1994) reprint of an issue (now called *Clinamen*) features a collage of a nude woman, assembled as to give the woman three breasts (Fig.3.2). Another issue has an “advert” on the back cover: a photograph of a woman (also nude) shaving her legs and a caption that reads as follows: “Does your mother have a fur coat? Mine already lost hers!” (Fig.3.3) Vácek described the reaction of the passengers on the bus as follows:

*I turned to one worker, who was going to work and was dangling over us on the bus rail. I asked him: “What do you think, comrade, could we include this in our magazine?” And he said: “Such bullshit, go screw yourselves.” Then the bus stopped at a stop, the doors opened, a wind blew, a couple of sheets flew out. I held the doors, so they wouldn’t close and one of us started gathering the sheets outside. The commuters were watching us. I was apologizing to them but also recruiting them at the same time. “We’re having an editorial meeting here, would anyone like the help us?” In this way, we joined the people and became part of them.*

347 *Anál* patafyziky – play on words. Czech “anál” means “anal”, while “anály” means “annals.”
348 *Už Jsme Doma*
349 The name PAKO is a play on words – it’s both an acronym for Patafyzicky Kollegium Teplice and the Czech word for “nutcase”. Note that in later years, PAKO is replaced by *Clinamen*, the name the publication carries today.
350 See Chapter 1, where I mention the riot that Jarry's *Ubu Roi* caused in a Paris theatre.
351 *Clinamen*: 1994
352 *Clinamen*: date of publication not indicated (early 90's)
353 Vácek: 2015, see Appendix A of this study
On another unspecified date, the group conducted an event titled *A Seminar on Therapy for Trauma from Defecation in Panel Buildings*. The seminar was announced as an international conference. However, it took place in a small restaurant called Little Cottage in Dubí. Vácek described the place as a “weird little pub in a makeshift wooden building that was a favorite among the visitors of the local spa.” What made the event “international” were the invitations the group issued to various guests from abroad, none of whom made an appearance. Another seminar arranged by the group took place in a field outside of Teplice. Officially, the seminar was devoted to a discussion of environmental preservation and included a performance by the students of the conservatory, who played classical music standing waist-deep in a pond. The music was intended to improve the living conditions of the pond flora and fauna. One snowy afternoon, the Collegiate held a *Race in Crystallized Water*. Dressed in swimsuits, some carrying inflatable swim rings and flutter boards, the members of the group met in a public park of a high-rise building neighborhood. They proceeded to “swim” in the snowbanks. The event concluded with an award ceremony for the “winners” of the “race.” During an outing to Macha Lake, the pataphysicians constructed a large comb using a boat paddle for a handle. They then used this instrument to “comb” the bottom of the lake. This activity was inspired by the legend of the Loch Ness Monster in the Highland lake and was conducted in the hopes of locating a local version of the legendary creature.

The above activities share one defining characteristic – they can all be interpreted as ironic takes on popular Normalization-era slogans and events which, as I discuss elsewhere, is an important aspect of *vnenahodimost* as defined by Yurchak. For example, the bus trip was motivated, according to Vácek, by a decision to address the communist allegation in the press that intellectuals were being cut off from the masses. The irony here comes from the collective’s literal interpretation of this statement which resulted in an attempt to physically integrate themselves with the so-called “masses” by invading public transit and inviting factory workers to contribute to an editorial meeting. The “international” conference in an obscure pub and the classical concert in the pond ridiculed academia. The nonsensical snow race made fun of the socialist penchant for ceremony and ritualization, which I addressed earlier. Macha Lake is a legendary artificial body of water founded, according to Czech lore, by in the 14th century by Charles IV, who was hunting in the area and decided it would be a good location to set up a lake. It has a long tradition as a popular summer holiday spot. However, after the war, the bottom of the lake had to be combed to remove military debris left behind by the retreating German forces. The construction of a giant comb and the subsequent search for the Loch Ness monster at the bottom of the lake was both a caricature of the post-war lake combing and of the 14th century legend.

Although imprisoned for a year for these activities and for publishing PAKO, Eduard Vácek does not consider them oppositional, nor does he identify himself as a dissident. Rather, he defines his lifestyle as “outside of the game ... like if you were talking about a game of chess and a pataphysician plays outside of the board. But sometimes returns when needed. But does not feel bound by the rules. Because he did not come up with them, did not sign a promise that he will follow these rules, it’s simply his choice.” Yurchak explains that “it is incorrect to view such ironic non-involvement as a passive or apolitical position, or as a departure from the sphere of political action into a state of negative Freedom.” Yurchak borrows the notion of negative freedom from the work of Isaiah Berlin, who defines it as “Freedom from” – that is, the ability of the subject or group to take certain actions in

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354 Chaloupka  
355 Vácek:2015, see Appendix A of this study  
356 See Chapter 1  
357 Vácek:2015, see Appendix A of this study  
358 “...подобную ироничную невовлеченность неверно рассматривать ни как пассивную или аполитичную позицию, ни как уход из сферы политического действия в состояние негативной Свободы.” (Юрчак:2016, 268)
the absence of external intervention.” Yurchak explains that Freedom from lies in opposition to Freedom for, or the “the ability of the subject or group to take certain actions in the presence of external intervention.” To Yurchak, the lifestyle of someone such as the Teplice pataphysicians, escapes both these notions of freedom, since it denies any kind of relationship or position towards the system. Yurchak writes that a lifestyle such as this “was not an expression of an act committed in spite of external interference, nor an act committed within the framework of this intervention.” In this way, collectives such as Eduard Vácek's illustrate what Yurchak defines as a “special...position” of the 1970s. This position was characterized by an “active pursuit of nothing,” according to Shinkarev, who is cited by Yurchak as having deciphered the position as an “active desire not to oppose anyone, not to humiliate anyone and not to strive to achieve personal success.” Through this analysis, Yurchak arrives at a definition of another type of freedom – a freedom of vnenahodimost. In other words, through the creation of ironic experiences, and by integrating these experiences into their everyday lifestyle, the Teplice pataphysicians embodied Vácek's idea of existing “outside of the game.”

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

The events staged by The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate took place at public locations – meaning that they were accessible to anyone at any time. More specifically, the Pataphysics Collegiate appeared on a city bus, among high-rise urban complexes, in a pub, in a park and at Lake Mácha, a popular summer swimming spot. However, these venues were also examples of what Heczková and Svatoňová call normalized spaces, or spaces where systematic rules of behavior were implicitly enforced. A normalized space is akin to what Zdravomyslova and Voronkov designate as official public. In a normalized space, the “[o]fficial public life and its relevant practices were controlled by party-state ideological norms and regulated by the relevant rules of communication and social integration as established by the state.” Ilya Utekhin writes that such public spaces presented a “...symbolically significant center...clearly defined by the requirements of monumental propaganda.” It would be easy, then, to interpret the events of the Pataphysics Collegiate as direct interjections into these normalized public spaces. However, when it comes to socialist space, Zdravomyslova and Voronkov “...see the ambiguity in the classic divide of public and private that we find in political and social theory...” because the official public mingled with a so-called informal public. They further point out that “[t]otalitarian control over the individual was never achieved in Soviet society, and multiple examples of state-independent activities were evidences of this.” The result was what Voronkov calls “places of individual freedom,” and, similarly to Yurchak, Morganová and others confines them to

359“Свободой от то есть способностью субъекта или группы к тем или иным действиям, при отсутствии внешнего вмешательства.” (ibid)
360“...способности субъекта или группы к тем или иным действиям при наличии внешнего вмешательства.” (ibid)
361“...не являлся выражением ни действия, совершаемого вопреки внешнему вмешательству, ни действия, совершаемого в рамках этого вмешательства.” (ibid)
362“...особую позднесоветскую позицию.” (ibid)
363“...активным стремлением к ничему.” (ibid)
364“...активное желание никому не противостоять, никого не унижать и не стремиться к достижению личного успеха.” (ibid)
365 Zdravomyslova, Voronkov:2002, 52
366“Ушедшая культура была построена на медийной монополии идеологически выверенного официального дискурса, и те тексты, транслировать которые могли бы общественные места символически значимого центра, были четко определены требованиями монументальной пропаганды, а не заказчиками коммерческой рекламы, как это происходит сегодня.” (Утехин:2012, 17)
367 Zdravomyslova, Voronkov:2002, 52-53
368Zdravomyslova, Voronkov:2002, 52
369ibid
later decades of the Soviet period (1960s–1980s). Within these places, “individual initiatives, collective actions, and state-independent communication could take place. These initiatives were never totally controlled or suppressed by the party-state and escaped the rigid regulations of Soviet collectives. They took place in social settings, especially in the so-called leisure sphere, although one cannot call them solely private.” As Utekhin points out, “[a]lthough we call these places public, public and private are not separated in them, in the sense that even in the square, friends standing in a circle form a completely private spatial configuration with their conversation and arrangement. Once in a public place, people often ‘set up camp,’ sit down to do their work in this temporarily occupied territory.”

Further, the events staged by The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate were inappropriate – meaning that they inverted or bypassed a type of activity generally expected at any given location. Here, again, it is tempting to explain the alienating effect of their events through a direct inversion of socially appropriate activity. However, a certain paradox of propriety existed within a normalized code of behavior, not unlike the paradox of censorship I discussed in Chapter 1. Ambiguity concerning appropriate behavior in public manifested itself through the widely accepted code of such behavior and the somewhat fluid application of this code to real-life situations. As the Czech art historian Pavlina Morganová points out, “[t]he degree of tolerance and severity of the police action depended on the individuals or the specific situation in the various institutions, which led to a certain vagueness of what was allowed and what was not, and to a general unpredictability of this border that many actively tested and tried to shift.” In other words, behavior that was viewed as inappropriate could become appropriate depending on the context and those who were performing the behavior. In short, behavior in a public, normalized space was expected to conform to a certain standard, which was, however, liable to interpretation. The lack of clear division of private/public as well as a certain ambiguity towards what was considered permissible public behavior complicate the interpretation of Vácek's activities are wholeheartedly subversive.

The manner in which the Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate created strange places can be interpreted via Yurchak's research. In his work, Yurchak identifies a certain irony of vnenahodimost. In Yurchak’s words, this irony consisted of “the unusual, ironic behavior” that certain people “invented, described, mythologized and in many ways embodied in their daily lives.” He provides two soviet examples of artistic collectives that heavily relied on irony and writes that the appearance of such groups at the end 1970’s and early 80’s was a “symptom of a shift of the entire soviet system towards increasing vnenahodimost.” This type of irony, according to Yurchak, is constructed from two elements: over-identification and decontextualization. Over-identification implies a relationship between the subjects (in our case, the members of the Teplice group) and the object of irony (so, for instance, a headline of a newspaper) that is set up in such a way that it is not entirely possible to discern if one is faced with a “sincere support of the object, subtle mockery or a strange combination of both.” Decontextualization
involves placing the object of irony in an unusual context, as the Teplice group has done with the editorial meeting on a bus, an academic seminar in a small pub or a swimming race in a snowed-in park.

I propose that The Teplice Pataphysics Collegiate constructed their strange places by way of irony of vnenahodimost. At the same time, the events of the group can be seen as temporally limited heterotopias, meaning that they succeeded in alienating or inverting normalized space. This was possible, in part, due to the ambiguous relationship between the formal and informal public along with malleable notions of propriety, which I mentioned above. As Utekhin writes, “[t]he spontaneity of a mass unidirectional movement or standing on the street, disrupting the daily regularity of using the place, conceals a danger to order, almost a challenge to the authorities: there seems to be nothing forbidden, but uncertainty is created.” In other words, the Teplice group achieved the deterritorializing effect through noticing and capitalizing on this tension/uncertainty by use of irony, pushing it to the level of the absurd and thus making it palpable. For instance, Váček reported that the passengers of the bus were upset by the intervention, yet nobody took steps to actively prevent the group from proceeding. This indicates that the activity, which – as I discussed earlier – was an ironic interpretation of a newspaper article, set up an ambiguous situation. For the duration of the activity, the passengers of the bus were uncertain how to respond because familiar rules of behavior in public transit ceased to apply, that is were not observed but not clearly broken, either. In this way, the bus temporarily became a deterritorialized or strange place.

**Concluding Notes**

This study started out by asking if a certain kind of projects can be examined as imaginary spaces. I identified four case studies and proposed that they can be interpreted as imaginary micro-worlds which appear due to alterations to the familiar environment. The case studies, two Polish and two Czech, were projects undertaken in socialist-era Poland and Czechoslovakia between 1956 - 1989. In chronological order, these were: the Theatre on Tarczyńska Street (1955–1958, Warsaw), the Separate Theatre (1958–1963, Warsaw), Footprint on the Window (1973–1975, Brno) and the Pataphysics Collegiate of Teplice (1980–1986, Teplice). The first three, addressed in Chapter 2, were cases of groups who met in private apartments, staging performances or poetry readings with theatrical elements. The Pataphysics Collegiate, discussed in Chapter 3, set up events in public places, such as a town bus or a park.

I provided a definition of and historical context for deterritorialized places – or, as Alexei Yurchak more precisely calls them in the Russian version of his study on the subject, places of vnenahodimost – which are spaces that occurred as a result of the performative shift that took place within the societal system of the late Soviet Union and the countries under its influence. This shift enabled events and entire lifestyles that neither participated in the socialist system nor went against it either; in other words, these new spaces were outside of the system, or deterritorialized. I then investigated these deterritorialized spaces as theatre performances taking place in private homes. That is to say, the combination of an inherently public activity (theatre) and a private space (home) created a heterotopical place that was not easily categorizable and therefore not straightforwardly included in the system. I concluded the study with an analysis of deterritorialized places outside the domestic space, where an ironic intervention into a public space set-up temporary cases of defamiliarization and ambiguity. In these Concluding Notes, I would like to address the wider implications of this study as

380“Спонтанность массового однонаправленного движения или стояния по улице, нарушающая повседневную регулярность пользования местом, таит в себе опасность для порядка, почти что вызов власти: вроде бы ничего запрещенного не происходит, но создается неопределенность.” (Утехин:2012, 18)
well as the prospects for future research.

To approach my case studies, I constructed a methodological framework around Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia along with Alexei Yurchak's work on deterritorialization/vnenahodimost. In addition, I involved a number of other concepts and theories, such as strange places (Heczková, Svatohová), abstract space (Lefebvre) or imaginary worlds (Wolf). Some of these ideas, especially Yurchak's, are imbedded in the history of the Soviet Union, namely in the period starting with Stalin's death in 1953 up to the dissolution of USSR in 1991. As such, studies that rely on Yurchak's terminology tend to focus on the understanding of the Soviet experiment (Fainberg, Kalinovsky:2016, Fürst:2017). However, this project is not primarily a contribution to the Soviet debate. By relying on a combination of historically anchored theoretical notions and concepts from other disciplines, such as cognitive studies (Turner) or philosophy (Foucault, Bachelard, Lefebvre), this study sought to bridge several type of analysis. The central aim of this study was to test how historically rooted concepts can be used in combination with notions of other disciplines to build a trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural approach.

My findings and the interpretation of my case studies as imaginary micro-worlds allow me to transplant Yurchak's terminology to a different scholarly discussion: that of otherworlds or imaginary worlds. These notions come from a wide range of disciplines. For instance, an otherworld is a term from medieval literary studies (Byrne:2016) while imaginary worlds (Wolf:2014) originates in literature but is also applied to analysis of other cultural phenomena, such as computer games. I propose that it is possible to use an analysis of projects like Theatre on Tarczyńska to answer an entirely different set of questions about how human imagination works and how we collectively construct and uphold our realities. This can be achieved by going outside of a historically rooted analysis and thus gaining access to a wider network of conceptual frameworks. For example, in her work on otherworlds in medieval literature, Aisling Byrne explores the building blocks on imaginary realms. One of these, according to her analysis, is what she calls pseudo-mimesis and it refers to detailed descriptions of imaginary environments that create “an illusion that what they are describing might actually exist.” Pseudo-mimesis involves detailed descriptions of small, minute details of a landscape or a world that, according to Byrne, serve no apparent narrative function – she calls such descriptions “ornamental” and compares them to what Roland Barthes called “insignificant notation.” In other words, Byrne's notion of pseudo-mimesis illustrates the importance of non-narrative elements in believable world-building. This can be related to Mark Turner's work on how humans construct environments. I discussed this in some detail in the Introduction and in Chapter 2, pointing out the cognitive significance of non-narrative aspects of reality to how we forge self-identities.

This dissertation demonstrated theoretical, historical and empirical approaches towards largely unknown (to an English-speaking reader) performance projects. In this way, it has contributed a new page to theatre and performance studies. In addition, this study opened opportunities for other kinds of encounters – for instance, that between theory and artistic practice. This dissertation laid groundwork for practical research projects geared towards the understanding of imaginary space construction. Over the course of this study, I have focused on imaginary spaces not only from a theoretical standpoint but also on their use in performance. To this end, I have explored (and am exploring still), the role of gaps and misinterpretations in human perception, which are necessary for our ability to imagine.

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381 Byrue:2016, 31
382 Byrue:2016, 30
383 ibid
In practice, such analysis relies on the imagination of a group to create a space that exists in the mind of the participants and then to overlay that imaginary space over the real one. For example, in May 2016, I conducted a workshop with professional actors in Oporto, Portugal. In an hour-long session, I have asked the participants to explore a previously unknown space. The participants were asked to keep their eyes closed for the duration of the experiment. The space was an attic of a large house. None of the participants have visited the space before. I led them into the space one by one and lightly navigated them, with minimum interference but ensuring their safety, through the hour. I then led them out, one by one. During the second part of this session, I gave each participant a differently colored marker and asked them to draw a map of the place they have just explored. The resulting map is a space that does not exist – it is a blend of the sensory memories of each of the participants (Fig 4.1). In other words, this study offers possibilities to further develop a practical body of work which seeks to create heterotopical milieus through performance. In addition, this study has also inspired the creation of a yearly international symposium, which I have conducted in Prague since 2017, and a body of practical research in heterotopical acting techniques, which I am developing within the Centre for Aliative Research (CenAR)\textsuperscript{384}, an independent organization I founded in 2009. Both of these initiatives present venues for future research to which this project is foundational.

\textsuperscript{384}Www.aliatology.com
Figure (1.1) “Overwhelmed with emotion, this Czech mother kisses a Russian soldier in Prague, Czech Republic on May 5, 1945, thanking one who fought to free her beloved home.” Source: www.theatlantic.com

Figures (1.2 – 1.3) Two of the many photos depicting Soviet liberators with Czech children, always girls, dressed in national Czech costumes. Source: www.tumblr.com
Figures (2.1-2.2) The cover and inside pages of Przekroj magazine (1956) showing scenes from Theatre on Tarczyńska

Figure (2.3) Theatre on Tarczyńska "Osmędusze" – Harfiarka. 1956. Source: Polish National Digital Archive

Figure (2.4) Lech Emfazy Stefaniśki, 1957. Photograph by Irena Jarosińska. Source: www.news.o.pl

Figures (2.7-2.8) Mask by Jiří Kuběna, 1974. Source: *Petr, 66*; and medieval misericord of The Green Man from Vendôme, France. Etching by Simon Garbutt. Source: *Wikimedia Commons*
Figure (3.1) Eduard Váček (right) early 1980's. Source: E.Vácek, personal archive

Figure (3.2) Cover of the Pataphysical journal Clinamen, 1994. Source: E.Vácek, personal archive

Figure (3.3) “Does your mother have a fur coat? Mine already lost hers!”, back cover of Clinamen, date of publication unspecified. Source: E.Vácek, personal archive
Figures (3.4-3.5) Snow race with award ceremony, Pataphysical event, early 1980's. Source: E.Vácek, personal archive

Figure (4.1) Collective Mapping, an imaginary attic. O.Kraska-Ryabets, Oporto, 2016
To begin, tell me a little about yourself - where are you from, where were you born, what was the situation in your family like?

I was born in Hradec Králové in 1947. My father was a member of the Communist Party, which he trusted completely. My great-grandfather even co-founded the party and he represented it in the Senate. Although, before that, he was a member of the Social Democrats, which split up and a part of its members founded a new party. Also, his daughter - my grandmother, was influenced by his ideology, she was in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and she brought up my father in the same spirit. Thus, my family line from my great-grandfather until my father were all communists. In my case, this ended. My father worked as a regional secretary of a science and technology company, it was a political office. Originally, he studied lithography and his great skill in the field was that he knew how to mix colors. He was a sought-after specialist. He would have certainly been far happier doing his craft, but he accepted the offer from the KSČ functionaries who assigned it to him.

My mother was from a family of a former Czechoslovak Legion member, who, after his return from Russia, became a local policeman and a devoted follower of President Masaryk. They used to argue about politics with my father and as a young boy, I sided with my grandfather, since he had a pistol and a police uniform, and he showed me old thick books about the war in Russia. Unfortunately, he shot himself quite young when he could not stand the pain caused by bladder cancer. My father worked as a printing press operator at that time and he used to show me big printing machines, which scared me with all the noise and the incomprehensible movements. My father eventually left this job and thanks to his political commitments he was charged to do political tasks. Time went on at a quiet pace, but when 1968 came and soon after the armies of our so-called allies entered the country, the situation in our family changed. Nevertheless, the change affected the whole society. Those who held some offices, but also the administrators, were subjected to a review by vetting committees. The same went for my father and many of his friends. Some of them immediately lost their offices and jobs. The reasons were their wrong answers to the questions they were asked as well as the fact that some of them were mere careerists and accepted the Party offices only as a part of their professional career ladder growth since their employment was conditioned by membership in the KSČ. If these people did not pass the questionnaire and were unable to respond to the questioning of their opinions, they were mercilessly fired. My father had a breakdown as a consequence of the sudden end of his career and he entered a disability retirement; he suffered from heart problems and he never really recovered from it.

All these fired friends started to meet, get drunk and reminisce the good old days. I remember one former policeman who had held a high police rank before he was fired. He got drunk, started crying and asking for answers to his questions: „I was fired from the Party, me, who put compromising objects to flats of people so that we could imprison them, and now they rewarded me by firing me.“ Then he told us about how the StB (Czechoslovak State Police) visited him and asked him to return his honours and various prizes, even a medal that he received from the president and he told us how he pushed them down the staircase. Such an environment was absolutely unacceptable for me. I argued with my father and his drunk friends because I had different points of view.

How did you deal with your situation?
The arguments were really violent, my father always kicked me out and told me that I was silly, young
and that I did not understand it. I had just finished the army service when the occupation of
Czechoslovakia started. The mood in the family was unbearable after my return. The situation went so
far that I left my family and moved from Hradec Králové to Prague, where I was looking for some job
with accommodation. Finally, I started working for the Army Constructions as an electrician, they
promised me some decent dorms in Vysočany, but I ended up in a settlement nicknamed China in
temporary mobile homes near the ČKD (Českomoravská Kolben-Daněk – national heavy industry
company), which used to be occupied by pimps and prostitutes during the First Czechoslovak Republic.
It was dirty and very undignified accommodation. After a while, the State Farm in Ďáblice offered me
a job, which I took because it came with an apartment that was to be completed soon. They showed me
my soon to be flat in Ďáblice and I was supposed to receive a decree for it. But once again politics
stepped into my life. The communists were progressively continuing their purge also in the higher parts
of the public administration. The new director of the State Farm had friends at the Ministry of
Agriculture. And one of his friends, an administrator from Slovakia with his family was fired from the
ministry and, therefore, lost the possibility to live in Prague, so he was offered by the director to take
my flat. I had no chance to appeal against it, I had no contract, the promise was only verbal. No one
counted with me.

In the meantime, I got married and I really needed a flat. We had no place to stay in Prague and I did
not want to return to Hradec Králove to my parents’. Therefore, I traveled in the north of Bohemia and
searched for some decent job with accommodation. It was difficult, most of the offers were in the
brown coal industry with bad working conditions, badly paid, with neglected dirty dorms for drunks
and people on the edge of the society. My wife lived in a studio flat of her sister who lived in Italy and
returned home after a government appeal. Those who did not obey the call were considered emigrants
and enemies of the state. When I travelled between the northern towns by hitchhiking, I stopped a
familiar driver. It was an old friend of mine from the army service. We had served together in Cheb and
now he was transporting meat for a slaughterhouse in Teplice. Within a short time, he convinced me
that the spa town of Teplice was the place I had been searching for and he gave me some tips on where
to ask for a job and accommodation. He was right, the OPBH (District Housing Company) offered me
a job and I even got a key from an unutilized studio flat. My friend offered to help me move my
belongings from the Zdiby Castle in Prague where I had my previous accommodation from the State
Farm.

We put everything in his truck and left for Teplice. There was no stove in the flat, it was snowing
outside and so I asked him to take me to the OPBH office to get some older stove. That was a mistake,
the comrade, whom I talked to, was a KSČ official. She cunningly ripped the keys of the flat from my
hand and said that I had no right of accommodation because the decision had to be made by the
housing committee that met once every six months. I told her that I had all my furniture in the car in
front of the flat. She did not care at all. She was a completely dehumanized example of a comrade who
cared about the party ideology and who maintained order and peace for work.

I went to my colleague with my tail between my legs and told him what happened. He offered that I
could put my belongings in the attic of his house and stay with my wife at his place for a few nights.
Within a week it became evident that it would not work; his girlfriend was hysterical and repeatedly
pretended a suicide attempt. I was wondering what to do. There was an abandoned concrete bunker in
the hill above Mlýnská street. It was one small room with no doors or windows, but it had a roof. We
were searching for a solution in the attics of houses. My friend helped me find an old door, he helped
me seal a window, we found an old stove with a pipe and then we only needed to gather some dry
wood from the Letná hill. That night we already had heating. When the stove went off, it was
immediately freezing in the bunker. My wife got sick and left to her parents’ in Pisek to recover. I resisted. The news about a strange person living in a bunker spread all over the Housing Company and many people came to look at me. They could not understand why I lived in a bunker while working for a company that managed housing. I got sick as well quite soon. In the mornings I woke up with frost in my moustache. I was one of the first homeless people - and one who worked!

To turn the situation around, I went to the Housing Company and visited the Department of Civil Defence. There was a head official cleaning and oiling his pistol. I told him that I was living in a bunker since I had no other choice and that I would have liked to have a post number assigned to receive the mail. The comrade stood up and said in a serious tone: “You will be considered fully responsible for arbitrarily occupying areas of civil defense.”

I suggested that OPBH should move me out on the street, that it was probably the only solution. My colleagues told me about some flats that they had recently been reconstructing. We went to check one of them. It was an old disused basement flat with rats, its floor had a dry rot fungus, it was humid and had a number of imperfections, but it was a flat with a relatively stable temperature. They helped me repair the flat to become suitable for living. I met some people from the underground, we were close in terms of our “class”. It was Čuñas - F. Stárek, Kabelka, and others. My neighbours denounced me as a dubious individual. By then, I was already doing visual art and so I transformed all that mould on the walls into paintings. I started visiting KAT (Klub Autorů Teplica - Club of Authors of Teplice), an informal group of young creators. I also became a member of the art group called Terč. I started doing exhibitions with them and so I became of interest in terms of ideology to the culture supervisors from the Local Cultural Centre. Those were my first conflicts with the secretaries, administrators and finally also with the StB (Státní bezpečnost – State Police).

After all the twists and turns, the OPBH finally repaired my flat and I lived there for around twenty years. My two children were born there. As time passed, I started to write a bit, publishing in underground magazines such as Vokno, Jazzstop, and others. The only ones who helped me were my colleagues who were Jehovah's Witnesses. Obviously. I wanted to know why these people helped me when everyone else ditched me. And thus, I accepted the offer to study the Bible. I spent a full 7 years with them and became the choir senior. I was doing preaching service and reached several important posts.

I started receiving their magazines and literature and many times I was astonished by what kind of crap was in there. Some young high school or music academy students were coming to me to study. When we were reading and analyzing those texts, I remembered the Annals of Pataphysics by Albert Marenčin presented in 1969 in the World Literature Magazine. I could not understand that people could believe some of the ideas. Moreover, I met a man who lent me some old writings of the Bible Students (former name of the Jehovah’s Witnesses) from 1917. This was pure pataphysics. Here, I understood what Alfred Jarry meant when he said that pataphysics goes beyond metaphysics the way metaphysics goes beyond physics. I could not help myself and started to bring the methods of pataphysics to the choir and apply them while studying the materials by the Watchtower society. I could not resist emphasizing some of the topics I found absurd or comical. These young people picked up on it, they got the game and joined. Each time we had somebody new, he could not understand, he had no idea what was going on. This was, in fact, the beginning of the Pataphysical College in Teplice. Later we all said goodbye to the Witnesses, we accepted some more people interested in joining and founded the Pataphysical College of Teplice.
By this, we moved immediately to a higher level of pataphysics. After a while, the students finished their studies and left. Some of them entered orchestras or other musical bodies, others continued to university, and so on. In the meantime, I met some new friends, for example, Mira Vanek, the musician from “Už Jsme Doma”, Petr Kuranda, the photographer, Václav Lukášek, the painter. We simply went on with our various activities. For example, we celebrated the end of the Thirty Year’s War, we created our first seminars, one of them was named: “Removal of the trauma from excretion among panel constructions”, and so on.

I am particularly curious about all the events you organized. Could you describe them in more detail?

The communists at that time reproached intellectuals that they were separated from the masses. We were publishing a small almanac - PAKO (PAfyzické KOlegium - Pataphysical College; “Pako” meaning “silly” in Czech). We published it so that the ideas kept flowing and the spirit would not get stale. Thus, we decided to make the editorial board meetings somewhere among the people to engage them in the creative process. We got on a workers’ bus transporting workers to a glasswork factory in Dubí. All the way in the back those old buses used to have an arrangement of four seats facing each other. We put wooden boards on our knees and created an improvised editorial table. We put sheets of the magazine on it, somebody read his article. I turned to one worker commuting to work who was hanging on the pole above us. I asked him: “What do you think, comrade, can we put this in our magazine?” and he said: “Such bullshit, go to hell with that.” Then the bus stopped at the bus stop, the doors opened, the wind blew, and some sheets flew out. I held the button so that the door did not close, and someone was collecting the sheets outside. All the passengers were watching what we were doing. I excused us while recruiting them at the same time: “We have our editorial board meeting here, would you help us from time to time?” In this way, we joined the public and became part of it.

Obviously, the StB found out, it was around the time when Seifert, the poet, died. One of the listeners of the RFE radio made invitations to Seifert’s funeral and distributed them around the city. He put them in the mailboxes. The police started searching for this man. When they were in my flat because of the underground magazine Vokno a few months before that, they found several issues as well as a couple of our PAKO almanacs. Their priority was Vokno then, so they left us alone, they just asked me some questions, if I knew Stárek, the magazine’s publisher. They found out that I wrote some articles for Vokno. Václav Lukášek, one of our colleagues escaped abroad. At the RFE he was talking about the Pataphysical College in Teplice, our activities, our almanac, the seminars, etc. The StB used the activities around Seifert’s funeral and with the information broadcasted on the RFE by Václav Lukášek, they came to arrest me.

I would like to learn about the seminar you mentioned. Where did it take place?

The seminar named: “Removal of the trauma from excretion among panel constructions” took place at a restaurant called Chaloupka in Dubí. It was a strange pub in a temporary wooden construction, which was popular among the patients of the local spa. We approached the seminar as an international one since we invited some foreign guests, but none of them came. Unfortunately, neither did Albert Marenčin from Bratislava, who was the Regent of Ubudoxology for Eastern Europe and Adjacent Areas. He excused himself and we received a salute from him. It was the date of the daylight-saving time change when the summer time changes to winter time. The StB came to arrest us, but because of the time change, they arrived one hour late when the seminar had already been over.
Then the winter came, and we organized a swimming contest in the icy water. We put on the normal swimmers, someone brought an inflatable swim ring and rubber pads for aquatic sports, we organised contests. We still have some photos documenting that.

Any other activities?

We searched the surface of Máchovo lake using a huge comb attached to a pole to check if we do not find some monster like in the one in the Loch Ness lake in the Highlands. In Věšťan ravine behind Teplice we organized a seminar about energy use and savings with some demonstrations, it was called “Sausages with poetry”, students of the music academy entered the lake up to their waist and as a quartet they performed for the aquatic animals… After the presentation by V. Lukášek on the RFE, somewhere at the regional committee of the KSČ, they decided that those pataphysicists from Teplice presented a grave danger to the society and they were waiting for an opportunity to intervene. When that man distributed flyers about Seifert’s funeral, it was their call for action. At around 4 a.m. the police commando came to my flat and they searched it. They suspected that I had a hand printing machine called cyklostyl. I was in my pyjamas and sick, but they did not care. They borrowed some suitcases from me and filled them up with the so-called banned or foul literature found in my flat. After their search, they took me to the detention where I spent 2 months. They wanted to charge me with incitement of riots but finally, they changed it to disorderly conduct. The judge sentenced me to one year of prison custody. I am the only pataphysicist who was sent to prison and served the entire sentence.

How did you get into pataphysics?

I used to read the Světová literatura (World literature) magazine. Under the chief editor Řezáč, this magazine started to also present various artistic topics. Albert Merenčin published a series called: Anály patafyziky (Annals of Pataphysics) in 1986, he wrote there about Alfred Jarry and the French Pataphysical College. I read that and told myself: “What the hell is this?” I did not understand it much, it was presented scientifically, but there was something strange about it. They were talking about the “Big belly order”, etc. It was bothering me, I could not let it go. And suddenly, as the Christians always say, the light came from heaven and I was enlightened. I got it and since then I became a conscious pataphysicist. Thus, Albert Marenčin actually helped me. I went to meet him in Bratislava and asked him how he became a pataphysicist. He told me that he was translating Ubu Roi to Slovak. He was working at the Slovak National Gallery and from time to time they had some foreign guests coming to give lectures. Some man named Satrapa came from France and Marenčin told him that he had just translated Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Roi into Slovak. During the discussion, he learned about the Pataphysics College in Paris and soon after they made him the Regent of Ubudoxology and entrusted him with educational activities in the unexplored areas. Thanks to Marenčin I got to know the Annals of Pataphysics before I became Jehovah's Witness, which turned out to be fatal with regards to my personal development.

When you were describing your childhood, you said that you grew up in a different environment and that the communist tradition in your family was quite long. I would like to know how somebody can accept a different opinion.

The most important influence was certainly my genetic equipment inherited from my ancestors. Although I have a very strong sense of truth, I love mystification. I realize that it might sound like an
inner contradiction. Let’s be honest, many consider pataphysics as a sort of an intellectual rash. But it is a life attitude. It is a state you get in when you get out of the projects of the others and live your own life. Obviously, all the conscious pataphysicists like to play, it is simply the great game (le grand jeu) with something that Alfred Jarry discovered as the world ruling principle always controlled by the same doctrine. Ubu Roi as a pseudo-messiah and doctor Faustol, who is a composition of the corrupt scientist Faust and a troll, a goblin of Ibsen’s type. This is the basic driving principle of the modern world. Ubu Roi is a totalitarian character and a coward at once. Mama Ubu helps him to obtain absolute power. That is the money pitchfork and courts depending on secular power, in fact, it is a pseudo-justice. Ubu Roi is essentially the driving principle of any contemporary society. Our last two presidents are the perfect personifications of Ubu, however, they do not reach the level of Ubu himself, they are more like the crown princes of the Ubu’s house, heirs of his legacy. Most of the contemporary European leaders are the same. If you analyze their actions, you will think to yourself what kind of scum they are, while they present themselves as saviours. This is a typical pseudo-messianism. The only real messiah should have been Jesus Christ. Everybody was waiting for his second arrival when he was supposed to win against Satan. But Christ did not come, instead, the pseudo-messiahs came. They came and occupied leading offices. At first, they needed some god. The first big pseudo-messiah was Constantine the Great who persecuted Christians and then his strange conversion happened. He was a politician in the first place and in the situation when Rome could not handle all the enslaved countries, he started using ideology. He changed his attitude by accepting Christianity and pronounced the well-known phrase: “I had a dream in which I saw a burning cross and I was told: In this sign, you will conquer.” He went on with murdering and robbing but under the sign of the cross. Thus, he became the first big pseudo-messiah. Alfred Jarry discovered and named pseudo-messianism. Doctor Faustroll represents empty scientism. He is someone who serves the evil consciously. Ubu needs his Faustrolls or pseudo-scientists. If Marxism comes to your mind, you are not far from the truth. These are corrupt politicians, political scientists and political elites who help to enslave and exhaust humanity in the name of some noble goals.

You were saying that some people have an inherent sense of truth?

Yes, that is right. A man is born with a sense of truth, he is capable of love and compassion as a good creature. Even though they are often brought up in a bad environment of a dubious family, children can intuitively feel that all of that could and should be completely different. Because of this, I consider it completely senseless and I was always against the persecution of children for acts of their parents. It does not make sense. I am myself a good example that we can take our own path regardless of the path of our parents. Arabic or Muslim concept of revenge is devious and unacceptable. Every person must be judged for his own actions.

I could not agree with you more. The way you describe the totalitarian period, the meeting of the PAKO magazine editorial board on the bus – under normal circumstances you would do it at home, right?

Of course. It was an intellectual reaction to the idiocy of the politicians who were saying nonsense and crushing the freedom of speech and expression.

Hence, you published it and at the same time, you describe how in your private space - your flat, someone simply comes at 4 a.m. and does whatever he wants. It seems to me that this period absurdly inverted the private and public space. That everything was turned upside down.
Yes, it was really like that. The unlimited power of the state controlled by one political party that reserved for itself the right for the freedom and even for the thoughts of its citizens. By doing so it made them lack freedom.

I wanted to ask as well if you agree with me that you missed your private space, or if there have been more examples like that about how it was all turned upside down.

If you ask me about privacy, I consider that very important. The state has only one role: to protect your privacy and your private property. You do not need the state for anything else. Everything else is just a question of your inner liberty. If you have it inside, if it is ingrained in you and you are also able to strengthen it, then for you there is no problem brought by totalitarianism that tries to limit your privacy. We made fun of totalitarianism. We made it part of the game. I continued with that even in prison. I even wrote a book there. In fact, I wrote two books thanks to my imprisonment. One of them is a fairy tale, it is called “Cesta” (“The Path”), the other one is a description of my arrest by the police and what happened until I left prison. It is called “Občanský průkaz, prosím” (“Your ID, please”). I went to prison knowing that I was going to a new environment where I would discover something new. It was something that deeply transformed my life. A year after I returned from prison, in 1989, the political change came. I was elected a deputy of the Czech National Council and I became the president of the Prison Committee. Hence, I went directly to take a look at the prison in Pardubice where I had served my sentence.

Mrs. Burešová, the chairman of the Czech National Council lent me her beautiful white Škoda 613. I came there and all the staff starting with the director were lined up. They were expecting some big shot while an ex-criminal got out of the car. They all knew me there, I had been there a year before. It was a huge surprise for them. And I was looking forward to it, these are the pataphysical chains of events, those strange turns life offers us from time to time. But I must admit that it was a strange period, which occurs quite rarely in history. At one moment you are homeless in Teplice, with no place to stay, the police are hunting you. Then you become a vice-chairman of the Committee on Legal Protection and Safety by the Czech National Council. Then a spokesperson of the Prison Service where I was offered to publish a specialized journal for ten years for my former incarcerators and guards to make them human. After that, I had an opportunity to study the history of prisons and started to publish a magazine titled “Historická penologie” (“Historical penology”). I was searching for injustices in archives and I was writing specialized articles about them.

If I was to resume my feelings related to the new post-revolutionary period, I have to admit that if there has been any freedom without attributes, which I could call that way, then it was only in the nineties. Since the fall of the Twin Towers in America, the totalitarianism came back. The officials have once again raised their heads. It is not the same totalitarianism as during the communist reign, but this one is hidden creeping totalitarianism. Once again it is possible to apply pataphysics.

I think that this is particularly important. Obviously, there are other matters that we can observe as well. We know about a not very well-known society called the Centre for Alternative Research, which shares several characteristics with pataphysics, with some variances, indeed. You said two rather interesting things. We watched a short documentary with my husband, its title is “V zajetí železné opony” (“Captured by the Iron Curtain”). You describe politics of that period as some kind of space. I would like to understand what you meant.

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I meant it as a space for creation. If they place you among fools, you basically have two options. Either you will fight the foolishness and physically resist it. Fools will make your life hell and in the end, they will kill you. That is the case of the story from the movie “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” and other examples from particular environments that we could say house a large number of people. It resembles the period when Dadaism was formed. The world had gone mad, World War I began. In this case, not all the world had gone mad, just a part of it, to which we belonged. It was a rule of the insane, or half-insane psychopaths, but what was difficult to understand, is that most of the nation took it as a fact, as a standard. But who was the lunatic? Those who organized it and who required it, or those who more or less voluntarily served it and pretended that it was right that way?
For me, both these groups were just one lot. Those who were organizing it and the others who were making it happen and who were living inside of the defined barriers. I did not belong to this common group. There were some situations when I went to see it, as in for a visit, out of curiosity. A conscious pataphysicist sometimes goes for an excursion, he goes to please himself with some frequently complicated non-sense and then he returns back to his neutral uselessness. And he says HAHA! to himself.

**But that means that pataphysical activities were intentionally in opposition?**

They were not in opposition.

**How was it then?**

They were not in opposition. The opposition is an integral part of the game. The attitude of a conscious pataphysicist is not bounded with the rules of this game since it is outside of the game, it is above the game. It is similar as if you would talk about the game of chess, the rules are well defined, but a pataphysicist sometimes plays outside the board. He did not commit to respect the rules, he was forced to do so. He did not choose this game. That is why he does not consider himself bound by its rules.

**Did you consider yourself a dissident?**

No, I had never been a dissident! Nevertheless, I received awards and a medal, and I was an active member of the third resistance. But this is merely another character in a play directed by somebody else. I think that I was primarily a free man and I insisted on it. And I did not let go of my right to freedom, which I was convinced myself to be entitled to as a free human being. I never gave up on this claim.

**So, could you say that it was a game with power that you were forced to play by the political powers and that the space of ideas and politics where all was formed was also the space where you founded the Pataphysical College, however, it was not controlled or indoctrinated by this political power?**

That’s a rather precise way of saying that. We were the fifth column for political power. We didn’t have any political ambitions though. We didn’t want to make the regime collapse or to fight against it using political measures. Why? People chose it, they went to the polls, every four years the communists reached 96% and more votes. Then you can have it, we don’t care. But I didn’t go to the polls, I didn’t pledge to support it. To me, all those big shots were just UBU-style crown princes. We merely created
our free space where ideology was not allowed. They would have liked to get there, obviously, to create their order with us. They considered it a sort of sabotage. But they were not able to get there. They tried to at least gain some control via their cops. When they were investigating me at the StB and later when the investigator was writing the statement with me before they sent me to prison, I could see that they were somehow at loss as to how to handle it. He didn’t know what to imprison me for. But they had to come up with something and make me a criminal at any cost. I had a friend who was moving abroad. In his drawer, he had two or three porn magazines. Something like that was not available here during the Communist era. So, I thought, to hell with it, if I cut it – those legs and arms, I could make a nice group collage out of it. Then we could make it into some surrealist illustration in the PAKO magazine. I took it from him. The StB found it while they were searching me and, finally, they had their case. “He was spreading pornography.” At the court, the judge asked me whether I had any pornographic magazines. “I did.” “And what did you have them for, did you lend them to people? “Yes, the editorial board of the almanac saw them, so, I lent them to whoever wanted to see them, nevertheless, I never forced them to anyone.” “And what did you have them for?” I said: “I wanted to make a collage out of them for our almanac.” and the judge dictated to the writer: “Write, the accused claims that he wanted to make a cake (the word for cake in Czech - koláč sounds similar to the word for collage - koláž) out of pornographic magazines.” I realized with astonishment that he did not know what collage was. I told myself, that he was once again a crown prince from the house of Ubu. A cake? It was completely absurd, I was supposed to cut it and put as stuffing into the cake, or make it into a crumb, or what? Until it dawned on me, I had no idea how he meant it. But obviously, it fit well with their justice thing that I had them. There were various scientists coming to the court, it was an amazing spectacle. If I had not been there as the accused party, I would have laughed until they would have sent me out of the room, because it was an absurd theatre.

The judge judged dissidents, he was specialized in persons who were against the regime. However, the investigator was involved in some minor criminal activity. When they let me out of prison a year later, I went to the investigator for an interview. It was supposed to be some kind of prevention. So, he warned me again: “Do not continue with your criminal activities!” I saw that he had my luggage on top of his cabinet, the one they filled up with part of my books and took away during my house search. “Isn't that my suitcase? Why is it here in your office?” And he said: “You see? And I was still wondering who I borrowed it from.” And I said: “You did not borrow it, you took it when you took my books away and you used it to carry them.” He cleaned it with a piece of rag, it was all dusty and I went home with it. The world around us was completely absurd, it was a pataphysical world and we did not have to create it artificially at all. We were just looking for various chains of events and focused on them.

And were you not afraid?

I don’t know about others, but I was not afraid at all. It was a game for me. *Le Grand Jeu.* But I had one problem. When I went to prison, I left two small children at home. After the house search and my arrest, my wife took the house search statement together with the list of all the things they confiscated and took it to Prague to somebody from Charter 77. At the end of the statements, there were signatures of all those who participated in the house search, around five persons from the regional administration of the StB and some comrade - a non-participating person. Quite soon it was published in the foreign press, they spoke about it on the RFE. That exposed the whole group of the StB officers. The police came all angry to my wife and they yelled and threatened her: “We will put you in prison as well, the same as your husband, and your children will be sent to an institution.” That was a hard moment for me. But we survived it because the case became well-known and they would not take the chance.
This was happening quite often, they would permit themselves a lot, but they were afraid of the foreign countries.

They were afraid of personal responsibility - that their names would become well-known. They were afraid that one day it (might) change and that they would be the ones punished, that they would have to take the responsibility. The situation was far different from the fifties. Perhaps the smarter ones learned from the past, they knew that in the fifties the political mill grained even those who served the party faithfully.

That seems like some kind of double deception, they must have been devoted to something after all, no?

No, no. They were not devoted to the party. Only a fraction of them were fanatics. But the majority of them took it as a profession. Some of them loved the power that had been entrusted to them. They were well paid, people were afraid of them, they enjoyed it. Simply the power to scare and to torture people. There was probably a very little of positive motivation.

But how is it possible? How can something like that occur?
It can. The Nazis, Gestapo, Bolsheviks, Jesuits and others, their motivation was similar. After all, it is still all around us. It was not an exceptional period at all. It happens every time when it gets an appropriate space. People stay, only historical background changes.

I describe similar kinds of events. We are talking here about quite big matters in my book I try to relate them. You were talking about swimming contests or an editorial board on a bus, this seems quite important to me, but it is not described in any literature. That is why I am looking for concrete details. How many people participated? What did it look like?

The pataphysical scene was quite small at the time. We were five or six, but we had a large circle of supporters. People knew about us. Only in retrospect, I found out that we influenced even the generations of younger people. Amateur theatre actors, performers, musicians, writers. Perhaps they are not conscious pataphysicists, but they transposed the spiritual climate into their music, their literature, into their lifestyle. For some of them, I am some kind of a father – the founder, the greybeard; I can feel it, but I try to resist it, I do not want it that way. Perhaps even other former members of PAKO feel the same. But certainly, it had that inspirational meaning. Those young people mainly felt that we had the strength, that we were not afraid to be free. Once they put me in prison, PAKO fell apart. Svatava Antošová left Teplice to wash dishes at Sfinx in Budweis, the others disappeared somewhere, but before that, they had to face the police committee, they received warnings, they were promised that their lives would be destroyed, went through house searches, had a lot of their things confiscated. They were scared and threatened.

That is why my charge contained some wording that might have made some people regret. It was not easy to resist. I could understand that. After two months of detention, I went home for a while, I had a break of about one or two months before I was lawfully convicted. I did not want to sell my skin cheap, so I wrote the first part of my book “Občanský průkaz, prosím”, where I described everything that had happened since my arrest. The text was published in the Prisoner Almanac of Charter 77. I met some friends during the break between my detention and imprisonment. Some of them were afraid, looking around to see if anyone was watching and they were saying: “You gave us quite a hard time…” “What? Me? They did to all of us and to me the most. Did I force you to anything?” I could see how their
character had been broken, how they accepted the police rhetoric without any resistance. Not all of them were strong. Obviously, they were pub friends, they enjoyed playing and those intellectual loops, humour, and creative ambiance, but most people get scared when it starts to get rough. They are not heroes. If they could choose, they would keep the side.

**Did you invite an audience when you were preparing something? Or it was rather a private thing?**

Only friends and friends of friends. Everybody had their families, friends, so around thirty, forty people gathered. Nobody was completely unknown. For example, in the ravine of Vještán, near Suchá village in Teplice region, we had a performance we would say today, about energy use. The name was “Sausages with poetry” there were some short lectures and practical demonstrations. Some people climbed up the rock on a rope, the others went on foot at a relaxed pace with breaks. Someone counted how much energy we save by going on foot at ease and there was a lecture about what practical use that can have for socialism. We might have slightly devalued the sports performances since we came to a conclusion that from an ideological point of view it had no use at all. V. Lukášek prepared a surprise. He exposed a five-liter bottle with shit in it. The bottle label read: “Nation to itself.” In that smutty period when everybody collaborated with the communists we stood up, applauded and we paid tribute to new values.

**The ravine of Vještán is a pub?**

It is not a pub, it is a natural amphitheater, the remains of volcanic activity in the Czech Central Mountains. There is a rock on top and a fireplace below used by tramps and to get there you had to cross a field. It would have been difficult for the cops to come there without being noticed. But there was no permanent informer around the Pataphysical College. When I was cooperating with a group of informal visual artists led by Valis (Zdeněk Jelinek) in Česká lída, they were doing exhibitions in Robč creeks meanders in an area called Peklo (Hell), there was an informer almost every time. The police hunted us in cars and with dogs, they knew exactly where it would take place and they circled the space; that was worse for the participants. But that was another group, a different participant composition, they were expecting it. That was underground. And they kind of enjoyed the hunting and the police maneuvers. Sometimes I had a feeling that some participants would be somehow disappointed if the police would not come.

**Was it a sort of a game?**

Yes, it was. You have to keep in mind that real socialism was infinitely boring. Nothing was happening. It resembled a situation when an old woman looks out of the window and watches the street, but nobody is passing.

**And I wanted to ask you if some of your activities were completely private? In the flats for example?**

Yes, once a week we met at my flat, all the meetings originally took place there, especially in bad weather. The air outside was foggy, filled with carbon products; to stay out of closed areas meant to risk your life.

**How often, or how long?**
The members of the College were usually creating something together. They wrote poetry, drew, wrote texts, some of them were doing photography. I had “The Annals of Pataphysics” from Albert Marenčín that were published in Světová literatura in 1969 and some other books and magazines from that period before the intellectual life was covered by fog of the real socialism. We read all that and discussed it. Eventually, the time had come for us to start editing our own almanac. The reason was not to let the ideas get lost and the spirit get stale. It was an irregular journal where we put our creations. It was written on a typewriter on a thin paper in 12 copies. Each time the first and the last copy was hardly legible.

First, there was a police hysteria surrounding the underground magazine VOKNO where I published some articles from time to time. I had my first house search because of VOKNO, the police also took a few copies of our PAKO almanac. The second time they were searching the invitation to Seifert’s funeral and at the same time, they were searching for our PAKO almanac. They confiscated it from the people who used to receive it and investigated them. PAKO never had political content, but it used to take a different point of view on all that ideological occurrence. As Alfred Jarry said, we tried to give a crooked mirror for a crooked muzzle, it was a double crooked projection that let the truth appear. The StB was trying hard to find all the copies even in Slovakia from Albert Marenčín.

**When you were meeting at your flat, was it for the almanac or did you also have some events there?**

Our flat was mostly about privacy. We needed that privacy in order to be able to communicate freely. The flat was a replacement of a club, which one may visit in a normal democratic society. Therefore, the flat had several roles. We talked there, presented our texts, painters were coming to show us their sketches or paintings, photographers brought their photos. The College members presented their latest creations to one another.

The comrades from the Cultural Department ONV (Regional Cultural Centre) made it hard to organize exhibitions in Teplice for the art group called Terč because of me. I irritated them a bit with my views. For example, I painted a black LP with various small structures, and I called it: “Murmurs of descending smog. “ Back then, Teplice and the entire North Bohemian Basin was almost continuously affected by a smog cloud. When it was raining the trickles streaming down the windows were completely black. It was soot and it formed deposits on the window sills, which needed to be wiped constantly. The smog was provoking cough, you couldn’t breathe, children suffered from bronchial pneumonia, it was literally a life-threatening situation. So, from me, it was a caprice, a poke in the ribs. Since then the comrades set their eyes on me. Hence, I preferred to stop exhibiting with the group and with some of them I was meeting at home - in my flat. Then, my flat served as a club and at the same time as a refuge from the smog. In that period the community was very important because if you live in a madhouse, in terrible living conditions and you are locked as if in prison and under surveillance, you need to find someone or a few people need to meet who are not crazy and do not have the prisoner spirit. But they will also happily wear the madmen’s clothes when they are in that environment. It was a kind of a mimicry; however, it was important to be able to step out of it anytime.

**And was there a certain regularity to those meetings?**

There was a regularity, the meetings took place around once a fortnight or weekly.

**And was there some associated ritual? Or some custom?**

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Sometimes we greeted each other by some pataphysical greeting, for instance: Buggery pshite, pshitey buggery! These were often paraphrases of Ubu Roi. Sometimes my wife baked something nice, sometimes we drank wine. It was quite festive; my colleagues would look forward to those meetings. To meet their friends, to learn some news and enjoy a glass of wine. My flat was an asylum.

When you read those different texts or you had exhibitions or showed new things, was it always the group of people or were friends invited as well, or were these friends invited to bigger events?

Official exhibitions were not possible without surveillance and a complicated approval system. The comrades often banned them or there were ideological committees who came and started selecting those paintings they didn’t like, which they couldn’t understand, or which offended the constructive effort of the working people. What remained were landscapes or unambiguous figures, but any surrealist features, Dada, Informalism or Divna Poetry were not tolerated. For example, I created a unique thing and called it: “A secret object for peaceful purposes”. The committee came: “What is it? What is it?” and “What are you trying to say by that?” When the StB came for an inspection into my flat, they said: “How can this hang here? Mrs. Vackova, I would take that and throw it out of the window and downstairs I would step on it and burn it all.” They felt like the entire world belonged to them. They wanted to own one’s soul. And they also wanted to prescribe what everyone should think. It went to ad absurdum the entire situation. That’s why most people succumbed to that pressure. I do not blame those people, it was their weakness. They were afraid of them because they could do anything they wanted to them. When I went to visit Ladislav Lis with my wife in a motorbike, the cops would inspect me on the road three or four times, for instance. And that was just 50 km from Teplice to Sosnová. But they eavesdropped it from somewhere that we would be going there and so they invested so much energy, you couldn’t even understand that. All those constant warnings: “Why are you going to see that person? He will lure you into some trouble.” Those were incredible things. So in this atmosphere, it was impossible to invite completely unknown individuals into the flat. Those who wanted to join us somewhere outside at occasional events, only found out last minute through a friend.

And now a few more things. First, in the documentary called V zajetí železné opony Mr. Gruntorád said that if all the pataphysical activities took place in Prague, they would have probably left you alone and that your issues were because of Teplice.
someone from the underground group and then a few strange individuals who stand out in some way and as such, they are also under surveillance. The StB guys have a map on their wall, the centres are marked with pins. They build a network of snitches around you, they get informers. They surround you. Well, then there is a question of what is more and what is less important for the Regional Department of the Communist Party. They had the need to watch out for those identified people and keep them strung up. Prague had a million inhabitants. And there were significantly more dissidents and Charter signatories. Therefore, it was all about power distribution.

One last thing then, you said that the totalitarian regime is back and that it is sort of secret.

Yes, it is back here. It is not so obvious anymore, but latent – creeping. Once the real socialism was over in 1989, we really felt relieved. Then came the free nineties but together with the collapse of the Twins in the USA, the officials lifted their heads again.

And that’s one thing that for instance the younger artists’ generation pays a lot of attention to. So I am wondering if you could comment on that. For instance us, we feel that it is happening, but we are unable to describe why.

Well, I will tell you my opinion. I think that the totalitarianism is essentially made by bureaucracy. By more or less anonymous officials. And perhaps not even by the government itself, by the elite. They hold various posts of the executive power as high- and low-ranking officials. The high-ranking ones need to show some activity in order to advance. The low-ranking ones (administrators) just do or start working on the tasks given by the high-ranking officials. Once a new minister takes office, he brings his secretaries and they bring a number of others with them. They have their friends and relatives to whom they are already indebted in one way or another and they need to place their people in the offices. They will start with purges and fire those who get well paid and do not have to do much. Until recently they kept the hard-working red ants, the administrators. But the politicians’ greed is so big that they decided to fill the administrators’ posts, too. Therefore, they will eventually fire even the administrators and they will replace them by their persons of interest, e.g. their recently graduated children. Now, suddenly, it turns out that the office is supposed to do some work but there is no one who knows how to do it. What do they do? They pay a company to do it for them. So they have this club of kindred spirits whose only qualification is their loyalty and then there are the so-called managers who search for the private services to whom they pay to do the work for them. That’s why officials’ work is getting so terribly expensive. It makes public administration so terribly expensive. And the connection to totalitarianism? Totalitarianism is their power tool because sometimes there are still some contemporary witnesses in the offices who see through it. They need to corrupt them or scare them or get rid of them; they need to remove the dangerous criticism. This is a case of absolute power. The Czech Constitution stands on three legs. Legislative, executive and independent judiciary power. And now, see how the political parties took over all the three legs. For instance, political parties have the right to legislative power. They have the parliament, they were elected there and that is where they should be active using the delegated political will and promoting it. Nevertheless, it is not enough for them. They also need executive power, so they pushed for their secretaries to have some political competence. Then there was a fight over whether there should be any political secretaries. And obviously there are and there will be. Even if the executive management belongs to professionals, they want to manage it politically. Politics should not step in this area. In the past, political parties occupied the entire country. Unofficially, they even had their investigators, prosecutors, judges and perhaps even prison guards and cops. When they wanted to remove someone, they threw them into that judiciary of
their case all the way to prison. If they needed to free someone who was a convicted thief or criminal, they also threw them into their judiciary. And it let those cases rot in a way that they never even reached the court. Basically, someone lost it, extended the legal period, etc. That’s the third leg, the independent judges who are obviously not independent; they work for one of the political parties or for the mafia. The economic and political mafia split the entire public administration and they abuse its mechanisms. That is the hidden totalitarianism. Those who control the public administration mechanisms, gain absolute power. Sometimes the mafias agree among themselves and divide the spheres of influence and territory, at other times they enter irreconcilable disputes. Violent disputes over resources, influence, and power.

**Is there a way out of that?**

I don’t know if there is a way out. But in order to even get to its beginning, the young educated people would have to start gradually changing the situation. It is a marathon. These new people must not engage in egoism and they need a strong desire for change. They need the love of the truth, sense of fair-play, love of freedom not only for themselves. There are very few such people; because people are their parents’ children and see how the parents act, the parents essentially prepare their ground, they provide them with education, give them too much money because they do not have enough time for them or buy them expensive gifts. They bring them up to become egoists. This nation is a nation of the deprived who need to start the healing process. That’s where it should all begin.

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Summary

Secret Theatre: off-the-grid performance practices in socialist Poland and Czechoslovakia

This study investigates off-the-grid performance practices that took shape in socialist Poland and former Czechoslovakia, between 1956 and 1989. The analysis challenges existing views on nonconformist creative practices as practices that are in binary opposition with topdown cultural initiatives. To unpack the network of interactions between the performances and their venues, I build on theorizing about deterritorialized spaces (Yurchak 2016) and heterotopias (Foucault 1971). Both terms, in distinct ways, refer to spaces that exist within the social system, but are not part of it; that ignore the system's narratives, yet do not actively oppose them – in short, spaces where dominant social narratives cease. My analysis reveals how performances blend with specific venues to create late-Soviet instances of deterritorialization or heterotopia. I thus refine our understanding of the Eastern Bloc experiment – an aim that is particularly urgent against the backdrop of contemporary media framing of the Cold War era and a so-called New Cold War.

Samenvatting

Geheim Theatre: off-the-grid-uitvoeringspraktijken in het socialistische Polen en het Tsjechoslowakije