Secret theatre

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

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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.44 Specifically, this study coincides with the end of the period of “Normalization”45 (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 ran 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." 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 ...” 47 In this way, he writes, performative acts are endowed with “... the ability to undermine existing norms without participating in direct resistance to them.” 48 Yurchak provides a number of examples 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. 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. 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. 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

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 все новых, ранее непредсказуемых интерпретаций.” (Юрчак:2016, 73)
47“...поскольку семиотическая и социологическая составляющие перформативной силы действуют одновременно, значит, конвенциональные высказывания могут приобретать непредвиденные смыслы...” (Юрчак: 2016, 67)
48“...способностью подрывать существующие нормы, не участвуя в прямом сопротивлении им.” (Юрчак:2016, 67)
49See Юрчак:2016
50Just, Bolton, Yurchak
51See Bolton:2015
52Just, Bolton, De Dubnic, Tůma et al
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

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53 Just:2010, 58
54 *ibid*
55 *ibid*
56 Kůpředu, Zpatky ani Krok!
57 De Dubnic:1960, 38
and demonstrations, carried with them “... a sacred centre of the festive universe ...”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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?”\textsuperscript{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 ...”\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.*\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{58}Утехин:2012, 17

\textsuperscript{59} ibid

\textsuperscript{60} ibid

\textsuperscript{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)

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{63}“Нормальный” советский человек не является ни активистам, 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 смыслями. 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,
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).

74Bolton:2015, 91
75Bolton: 2015, 124
76Bolton: 2015, 128
77Юрчак:2016, 304
78A deliberate misspelling of the word “okno” reflecting the was the word is colloquially pronounced
79Author’s interview, Fall 2013
80Bolton:2015, 128
81Tuzemský 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:

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

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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: учител, 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 ть 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 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.

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, 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.

After the War

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 for 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

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

85Stalin held the post of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death in 1953
86Dabrowski:2014, 425
within the regions (local communists) and from the outside (mostly the Soviet Union). 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).” 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.” 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].” Along with the sentimental friendliness diluted with ambivalence towards the USSR, the postwar economic crisis did much to dull any sober political ruminations. 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 progress 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.” 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 altered and “...dipomatic negotiations concerning the country’s future possessed an air of distinct unreality.” 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.” 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

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97 Davies: 2005, 366
98 ibid
99 Davies: 2005, 422
100 Davies: 2005, 365
101 Dabrowski: 2014, 410
102 Davies: 2005, 365
103 Pánek, Tůma et al: 2014, 504
104 Dabrowski: 2014, 422
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.”\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, as Patryk Babiracki points out, “[i]t was mesmerizing to watch Poland’s return to life.”\textsuperscript{106} 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 ...”\textsuperscript{107} 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”\textsuperscript{108}); 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.

\textbf{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.”\textsuperscript{109} Babiracki confirms that “[t]he years 1948–1953 in Poland witnessed creeping Sovietization.”\textsuperscript{110} However, he pauses to ponder what Sovietization actually means and arrives at the conclusion that it is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{105}Davies:2005, 413
  \item \textsuperscript{106}Babiracki:2015, 52
  \item \textsuperscript{107}ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{108}Dabrowski:2014, 426
  \item \textsuperscript{109}Dabrowski:2014, 428
  \item \textsuperscript{110}Babiracki:2015, 155
\end{itemize}
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)
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.

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116 Davies:2001, 7
117 Babiracki:2015, 3
118 Letná 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.
119 Babiracki:2015, 4
120 Davies:2001, 7 – 8
121 Ibid
122 In 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.” 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.”

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 Thaw, is described in more or less fluid terms when it comes to Soviet history, 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

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123Dabrowski:2014, 428
124Dabrowski:2014, 428
125Оттепель (Rus.)

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dynamited at night (although some safety concerns were at play here). 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’ occurred” 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.” 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.”

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.” 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.” Such productions would be unthinkable in Prague in the same years, despite the fact that this city, along with Brno and Bratislava, received a tour from Théâtre National in Paris; popular Czechoslovak shows visited France; and the year saw several productions of Western classics by Ibsen, Moliere and Brecht.

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

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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
pluralism.” 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.” 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.” These spaces came together to form a single, large space – what Yurchak calls the “soviet imaginary world.” 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 Yogis, within Soviet culture. To Fürst, dropping out is a “spatial separation”, which necessarily includes a consideration of borders because “only 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. 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

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Politization of Theatre and the “Paradox of Censorship”

Yurchak explains that one of the most important conditions for the creation of vnenahodimost 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.”

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. An example, Just cites a speech against Lysistrata made by a member of the Theatre and Dramaturgical Committee (DDR or DPK), Jaroslav Pokorný, 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, Pokorný 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.”

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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, tragicomedy, 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 “*merdrey!*”\(^{154}\) 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
theatre one of the most important means in the process of building a socialist culture.” 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.” 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.” 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.” 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.” 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
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).