CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE OBLIQUE COORDINATE SYSTEMS OF MODERN IDENTITY

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Few today would deny the importance of the study of images, perceptions, and mentalities on which the modern social order rests. A possible approach to these entities leads through an understanding of the processes of mental mapping. In 1905, Endre Ady wrote,

> Ferry-land, ferry-land, ferry-land . . . even in its most daring dreams it is only roaming back and fro between two shores. From East to West or, rather, the other way around. [. . .] Sporadically, there have already been souls who have engaged with the West. [. . .] Some 10,000 people have run ahead. They have become European in nerves, blood, thought, pain, and thirst. An overdeveloped type of human has established itself here: they are ahead of Hungarian society by at least 100 years. These holy forerunners did not even dream of not being followed by hundreds of thousands. [. . .] You are great, my people; you are great. You have been continually struggling with Europe for 1,000 years. In the meantime, you have been recruiting troops. Although you were bleeding. But you have never allowed Reason to triumph over the heads of your children—you live in the middle of Europe as a living protest against piercing the virginal membrane of barbaric existence. [. . .] The Tartars are moving on turbulently under the Carpathians.[1]

Nearly a century later, Péter Esterházy was asked, in a 1992 interview, "What kind of country would you like to live in?" He replied, "I share the helplessness that constitutes Europe today. This empty head, this shoulder-shrugging, this shy gaze toward the ground—this is Europe. Therefore, my answer can only be a practical one, and rather suspicious too. I prefer to cite my friend who says he would like to live in a country like Toscana inhabited by Englishmen speaking Hungarian."[2]

Symbolic geographies reveal how human agents, in particular historical and cultural contexts, define themselves by locating themselves spatially as well as temporally, drawing the boundaries of social spaces where they are *within,* and relating themselves and their spaces to *others* and to what lies, in their discursively constructed spatial/temporal order, *without, behind,* and *ahead*. What makes these socially and historically situated processes really important is their intimate relationship to the formation of identities and, indeed, to identity politics (including the regular attempts in all kinds of modern political regimes to manage identities through the projection of images about themselves and the others).

The definition with any exactitude of any location in a physical space is a rather complicated matter, as is clearly demonstrated in the history of geographical coordinate systems. Moreover, any point's exact location on, in, or above Earth can be defined only on the basis of a set of conventions contested, negotiated, and decided on by humans. There has been nothing of an "objective necessity" forcing modern geographers of the 1880s to choose the line passing to the rear of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, U.K., as the prime meridian (the 0° longitude), defining everything that lies east of it as the Eastern Hemisphere and everything that lies to its west as the Western Hemisphere. If even our ways of "bringing order" into the natural world are so contingent, so highly dependent, on social interaction (negotiations producing and reproducing conventions—more or less generally shared understandings—as to various reference points, reference lines, and/or procedures of mapping), it comes as little surprise that the regimes (criteria, standards, and procedures) defining the very "coordinates" of our symbolic geographies exhibit a overwhelming level of variability and exposure to human agency and never-ceasing contestation.

Mental mapping in the modern and late modern era can and should certainly be understood and studied as consisting in at least four distinct, although partly overlapping operations.[3] The first of these is the construction of regionlike units by associating alleged constituent parts of an area (like "the West" or "Eastern Europe"), whereby resemblances producing apparently

"shared patterns" are emphasized at the cost of differences/deviations marring these patterns.

Moreover, a position is assigned to these parts (and the coherent whole they are imagined to constitute) in the prevalent "developmental hierarchies" of the time, localizing the region thus construed on an axis between "barbarism" at one extreme and "civilization" at the other, between "Asia" and "Europe," between "traditional" and "modern," between "backwardness" and "development." Karen Gammelgaard's study in this volume of Czech travelers to Russia at the end of the long nineteenth century describes their increasing disenchantment as they found social conditions in the empire, which was expected to act as the enlightened and modern patron of all the smaller Slavic nations to its west, to be generally backward and despotic. As the Czech visitors articulated their perceptions of Russia in contrastive terms, and as they (at least Havlíček and Mrštík) associated the negative Russian characteristics with the notion of "East," "Asia," and/or "Byzantium," the position of the Czechs (and the Czech lands) was "mentally transferred . . . westward." Havlíček's, Mrštík's, and Stašek's challenges to the contemporary Czech literary intelligentsia's cherished idea of Slavic unity with Russia implied and brought with them the redefinition of the very system of coordinates used to identify the place of the Russians and the Czechs on Earth: the former appeared, more and more, to have been lost to "Asia" at the same time and to the same extent as the latter's claim to be part of "Europe" grew firmer and more obvious.

Mental "regionalization" is also shaped by "peopling" our arealike constructions, that is, by naming and characterizing physically, mentally, and culturally the humans who populate them.[4] Advocates promoting two different models of public health in Hungary of the 1930s, as is ably shown by Erik Ingebrigtsen in this volume, did not hesitate to promote their own favorite solution by depicting it as an authentic Magyar model, developed on Magyar soil in response to Magyar needs and conditions and/or, even, to "the unconscious desires of the Hungarian race." Some of the arguments defined this imagined Hungary, in an effort to devalue the alien (American, French, or German) models of public health, by claiming that foreign models could hardly work in the backward Hungarian countryside, "where you first and foremost do not find mothers possessing sufficient intelligence" for a successful adoption of the Western model of general public health.

In "addressing" a region, the region is posited as lands "where everything remained to be done" and as a place that needs to be told and taught what to do (as in Voltaire's Russia). The region may instead be cast as lands from

where salvation, wisdom, "best practices," and beauty originate (as the Soviet Union was imagined in various accounts, travelogues, and particularly in propaganda works translated from Russian and published in East Central Europe in the 1950s).[5]

Much has been (and even more will be) written on the history of the East-West division, with all its complications and complexities, in the minds of modern and late modern Europeans.[6] Considering the great variation by period, country, and sociocultural milieu from which the analyzed corpus of texts and/or other forms of cultural expression (cartoons, films, photos, music, and other types of art) comes, it is little wonder that we find it hard to agree about the significance of this binary, or even the place(s) and time(s) in which it originated. It should be easier to agree, however, that the Cold War era was the unique period when "East" and "West" became the constituting elements of the most important single bipolarity in terms of which various communities and major political and cultural projects and movements tended to define themselves and one another.

THE OCCIDENT WITHIN—OR STATE SOCIALISM'S DRIVE FOR EXCEPTIONALISM AND MODERNITY

A majority of the essays in this volume discuss "Eastern" (communist, state-socialist) perceptions of the "Western" (capitalist) world. Barbara Walker's perceptive essay on the relationship between Soviet dissidents and Western journalists reporting from the USSR stands out from this set in that it alone focuses on the microdynamics of East-West encounters and interaction. Emphasizing the role of Soviet isolation in general and the constant stress dissidents were exposed to by the regime, Walker shows clearly the role that the insider-outsider distinction played in this interaction as well as the high demands placed on the Western journalist if he or she wanted to establish a workable rapport with dissidents (and the high expectations of involvement and shared values one had to face if accepted and identified as an insider). Rewarded with an excellent analysis of the culture of dissidence and the dynamics of group formation along the boundary between insiders and outsiders, the reader is eager to see future reports from Walker's research discussing in greater detail what it meant for the dissidents to be Soviet, how they related to the socialist social order, and how all this affected their relations to Westerners (and Western journalists).

All the other essays confront the issues of *systemic divide* or *systemic identity* when discussing various social fields' histories under state socialism in terms of the symbolic geographies they yielded. Without wishing to turn the wheel of historiography back to the times when a great deal of theoriz-

ing about the Soviet-type political, social, and cultural order emphasized the "ideocratic" nature of these regimes, the "despotic implications of Marxism," these new studies on identity formation and identity politics demonstrate unequivocally the supreme impact of the Marxist-Leninist view on the social universe of the modern and late modern era in prevalent discourses of identity throughout the career of the state socialist project. Although we strongly believe that the discourses of socialist society need to be taken seriously, this claim is not about the "primacy of ideology" imposed from above. It is about a common structuring feature or shared tendency of discursive practices (the practices of imagining) observable in various walks of life in state-socialist societies. There is no direct path from this claim to suggestions that try to assert anything like an ontological priority of "ideology," even less of discourses, over all other practices in these (or other) societies. A discussion of the ways in which discursive and other practices combine to co-produce and reproduce a social order is beyond the scope of the studies included in this book. The findings presented here offer valuable observations concerning the dynamics of discursive processes of identity formation along the Cold War East-West divide.

The Marxist-Leninist theory of social development tells a relatively simplistic story about a sequence of social formations. The sequence is ordered along a timeline between the extreme points of a society characterized by unstructured, primitive communalism and another one structured by the free and voluntary association of free individuals (communism). Between these points the drama of history plays itself out in the course of four acts: slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Each act is propelled forward by the antagonism between classes of "haves" and "have-nots," exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled, oppressors and oppressed. As the latter fight themselves into the position of the upper dog they undergo a metamorphosis from a progressive social force (bringing down a retrograde ancient regime and promoting a new social order conducive to general economic and cultural development) into a reactionary one (clinging to the status quo and resisting the "demands and requirements of socioeconomic progress"). The most important single property of each class is its position in terms of ownership with regard to the "means of production." Indeed, each social formation is defined by its underlying "mode of production," which in turn is structured by the prevailing type of ownership. Thus the "cycles" of progressive and retrograde phases in the history of social classes, and of social formations, are determined and driven by the dynamics of the "economic base"—that is, the trajectory of the mode of production (with type of ownership as its most decisive single dimension).

In this narrative of universal social development, socialism is distinct

from any preceding social formation, and most emphatically from capitalism. It is conceived of as a "transitory society," a formation between capitalism and communism—it is no-longer-capitalism and not-yet-communism. Its historical role is to eliminate capitalism as well as to put an end to all forms of exploitation, private ownership (of the means of production), and oppression of humans by humans. Like other transitions between modes of production, even the transition from capitalism toward communism is seen by Marxist-Leninists as a process of sublation (*Aufhebung*)—that is, as a "dialectical" process that includes elements of destruction/negation as well as preservation (the East German discourses appropriating various legacies of high culture analyzed in this volume by Elaine Kelly and Greg Castillo constitute two cases in point). Also, socialism is expected to be and regarded as (in Marxist-Leninist developmental terms) superior to capitalism because of its socially optimal use of resources based on collective ownership and central planning. In this view, socialism is there to bring history to its conclusion and to emancipate and thus to enable humankind to embark on its *real history:* communism.

This, in a nutshell, constituted the *master narrative* of the state-socialist project. The point I wish to make here is not about the cognitive status of this narrative. The point is, rather, that this narrative had an immense significance in shaping the discourses of state-socialist regimes. It had this significance not merely because generations of professionals and intellectuals, who grew up and obtained their education during the years of communist rule, were exposed to it in a variety of forms (having to read during their university years such subjects as "historical materialism," "political economy," "scientific socialism," etc.). Just as important is that this narrative provided the state-socialist project with a general historical legitimacy and explained and justified the power position and avant-garde role of communist elites. The identity of these elites was anchored in this narrative as was their consciousness of their historical mission and call. The master narrative of state socialism delivered all these goods thanks to its capacity to discursively create and assert a meaning for socialism as a historical project—and to its ability to provide, over a long historic period, a powerful mental mechanism for constructing a *systemic identity* for socialism.

This master narrative asserted itself as a paradigmatic core to which discourses of various social fields tended to assimilate. As Anne Gorsuch's illuminating contribution on Khrushchev-era Soviet films about tourism shows, this tendency of assimilation could assert itself in attempts at *domesticating* such "Western traits" of life as were deemed tolerable and, most important, compatible with the state-socialist social order. Indeed, as Gorsuch claims, it was characteristic for this era to "combine cautious optimism about permit-

ting a now Sovietized 'difference' with profound anxiety about the threats too much of this might pose." Elaine Kelly's and Greg Castillo's exemplary discussions of the efforts of East Germany's music and architecture establishments competitively to appropriate Wagner and disown-then-embrace the Bauhaus legacy in architecture not only confirm this claim of a tendency to assimilate but remind us also of all the complications stemming from the changing concrete political (and identity-political) context within which this assimilation to the master narrative was attempted.

Highly pertinent to this point is the presentation of Edmund Goldzamt's book on the architecture of city centers and problems of heritage in David Crowley's essay, or B. P. Mikhailov's *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* entry on architecture, turned into a booklet by the Deutsche Bauakademie, presented and discussed in Greg Castillo's contribution. The master narrative defined the norms and patterns according to which the (capitalist) "West" and (socialist) "East" were imagined and contrasted with each other in spatial as well as temporal dimensions. It was the language in which the discursive practices of mental mapping were exercised: the category of (capitalist) West was defined; hierarchies of economic and cultural progress (and potentials of such progress) were constructed; and the socialist "East" was staged as the future matrix of the yet-only-capitalist "West."[7] This was the language that helped populate this "backward" region of the "West" with selfish, profit-seeking capitalists, educated middle classes characterized by alienation, and working people turned into slaves of consumer desires and haunted by *Angst* about losing their jobs, becoming ill, or failing to secure a good education for their children—as opposed to their Eastern, socialist counterparts. In the East, according to this view, central planners (the apparatus of the party state) worked hand in hand with socially engaged intellectuals and professionals in the best interests of socialist society as a whole; workers acted as rational, socially conscious, and responsible consumers and enjoyed the benefits of a fully developed institutional system of social protection and security, of a public infrastructure offering free access to health care, child care, and education; and no one ever needed to fear unemployment or for the fate of the next generation.

The power of such imaginings is clearly demonstrated by Catriona Kelly's discussion of the Soviet "missionary advocacy of its own provision for children as an international model." She shows ably how such contrastive images may lead to policy failures both because policy makers might become hostages of perceptions generated by their own propaganda about the Other, and because the *domestic* success of discourses of systemic superiority tends to define (raise) popular expectations (and thus undermine the regime's legitimacy) at home. Susan Reid's essay analyzes utterances that reflected and shaped the

discourses of the Khrushchev era on socialist domesticity and consumption, as a new "front" of Cold War–era systemic rivalry opened up: that of the "living standards race." The decade of Khrushchev's New Course distinguishes itself first of all by its attempts to abandon the productivist bias of the Stalinist socioeconomic order and to allow greater room for and devote more resources and attention to the development of consumption. Khrushchev, and some of the communist leaders in East Central Europe, obviously recognized the dissatisfaction of the peoples ruled by them. Their consumerist turn, I believe, had as much to do with East Central Europe's uprisings between 1953 and 1956 as with demonstration effects from the West (the "Nylon War"). It is an interesting observation by Reid that discourses around the modernization of domestic life tended to revive the ideas current during the 1920s, inasmuch as they pleaded for *collectivist* solutions for not only child care but also laundries, cleaning agencies, and the establishment of publicly owned and run rental services for household appliances.

This is, then, the other distinguishing feature of Khrushchev's consumerist turn. Whereas the emphasis on the collective share of consumption (free health care, child care, and education, strongly subsidized communal housing, etc.) was sustained in almost all the countries of state socialism throughout the communist era, discourses aimed at developing and offering *collectivist* institutional solutions in newly emerging areas of consumption in the late 1950s and early 1960s—where *personally* (privately) owned durables (various household appliances but also, in several countries, housing itself and, which is quite important, cars) became major items indicating the growth of personal (family) well-being and wealth—constituted a remarkably short-lived feature of the post-Stalin order of socialist societies. In my view, this shows the unease with which communist elites allowed the societies they reigned over to join and partake in modern trends of consumption and domesticity (where the capitalist West was not merely ahead but was the trendsetter), being concerned with the integrity of the distinctive systemic identity of the state-socialist social order. What we are dealing with here is *the fundamental tension of the state-socialist project:* the tension between the push for modernity and the profound need to steer modernizing developments so as to produce and reproduce systemic exceptionalism rather than to blur the distinction between capitalism and socialism. In this regard, what seems to me to be intriguing is that (a) Khrushchev had a premonition about the dangers that a consumerist turn might bring with it for the identity of socialism, and (b) the remarkable absence of this same kind of concern in the aftermath of the coup against Khrushchev. The Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership's decision to enter into the "deal of the century" with Fiat to transfer a complete set of car production to Togliatti heralds an

era in which satisfaction of consumer desires took precedence over systemic identity. It appears as if Khrushchev's ideas and policies of a "socialist car" (based on a radical expansion and development of public transportation, taxi services, and the development of a large network of state-owned car rentals) were simply forgotten. The change benefited private mass automobilism—that is, the Western pattern of modernity, to which even some commoners in Khrushchev's Soviet Union had given a system-conscious, highly critical reception, as is well shown in Susan Reid's discussion of the American National Exhibition in Moscow's Sokol´niki Park in 1959. While under Khrushchev there were still attempts to define a "socialist mode of consumption" at least in some dimensions of everyday life, in its immediate post-Khrushchev edition, "socialist consumerism" throughout the "Eastern bloc" had precious little to offer when it came to distinctly *socialist* characteristics. I believe that the contemporary New Left critique of the consumerist turn in the socialist countries made some acute observations in this respect. André Gorz wrote in 1967,

> Socialism, in short, had to cease to be a state of scarcity, austerity, and drabness; it had to satisfy individual daily needs so that the emphasis laid on cultural and collective needs, and their collective fulfillment, might be seen to be genuine. But as it moved in that direction, it also had to demonstrate that the socialist pattern of consumption was not a tardy imitation but an innovation qualitatively superior to the capitalist pattern. Thus far, this demonstration has been lacking. Everything has happened as though production and consumption policy, even in its long-term implications, was mainly an imitation of capitalism. Priority has been given to the type of individual equipment popularized by so-called affluent capitalism. This was normal in the case of such things as bicycles, motorcycles, radios, and canned foods but less so in the case of cameras, refrigerators, and individual washing machines, since the housing shortage and smallness of apartments create acute problems for the town dweller, and since the installation and improvement of cheap collective services—such as public transport, shops, nursery schools, house canteens or restaurants, delivery laundries—would free women from domestic chores and hold greater advantage on all levels. Why, for example, was it thought necessary to produce washing machines, notably in the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia? And why, since the dismissal of Khrushchev (who had different views on this particular matter), has the U.S.S.R. been concerned with the development of private motoring?[8]

Indeed, as David Crowley puts it in his contribution in this volume, a "hybrid form of modernity" seemed to be emerging and was generated by what Václav Havel saw as "the historical encounter between dictatorship and

consumer society." Of course, in terms of the master narrative of the socialist project, this kind of modernity was not only unbecoming (such "hybrids" were produced at the time at a number of places—e.g., Franco's Spain or the Colonels' Greece) but also quite displeasing and disturbing, because of its obvious destructive potential for socialism's systemic integrity and identity.

In Paulina Bren's rendering, the communist leadership of "normalized" Czechoslovakia appears to have found an answer to the vexing problem of combining the consumerist turn with sustained systemic exceptionalism. According to Bren's argument, Gustav Husak and his regime recognized that competition with the West in terms of consumerism would have been a futile enterprise. Therefore, and unlike their East German counterparts (who were compelled to take up the glove of the West because of their population's much more direct and intensive exposure to demonstration effects from West Germany), the Czechoslovak normalization regime put the emphasis on what it termed "the socialist lifestyle," with "self-realization" at its core. Normalization's "society of social comforts" (full employment, blind or half-blind eyes turned toward low work discipline, low work intensity, low productivity and quality, cheap subsidized housing, and services, etc.) was supposed to provide things the West did not.

Although this fits well with the "timeless" and general pattern (also found in the German Democratic Republic) of emphasizing (and overvaluing) items of collective consumption and socialist welfare as opposed to personal/individual consumption, it did not, because it could not, constitute an effective way to absorb all the insecurity caused by the advent of consumerism and the lack of collective (systemically correct) forms of appropriating (consuming) the goods that constituted the icons of modern everyday life. In terms of discursive practices a response in fact came in the late 1960s and during the 1970s: first, in the form of a major wave of publications that tried to assert the exceptionalism (systemic identity) of socialist society against contemporary social ("bourgeois") theories of modernity (such as "stages of growth," "industrial, consumer, postindustrial societies," and various convergence theories); second, in the form of ambitious national and international (COMECON) projects, conducted mostly by sociologists, to study prevailing "ways of life" or "lifestyles" in the socialist countries empirically, in the hope of generating insights that could be helpful in defining what the "socialist way of life" or "lifestyle" might be and what it should be; and third, by way of attempts to develop a Marxist-Leninist theory of the "socialist mode of consumption."

Part of the failure effectively to meet the systemic challenge of the West on the "fronts" of everyday life and consumption, I believe, had to do with the fact that these discursive responses came too late to be able to affect what had

by then become well-established practices of policy and everyday life. To cite an example from the history of automobilism—in Hungary, in the mid-1950s, when there were only 1,800 to 2,400 cars in private ownership, it would still have been feasible to try and steer the development of automobilism along a collectivist design similar to Khrushchev's (with major investments to develop readily available and accessible taxi- and car-rental services side by side with the expansion and thorough modernization of the infrastructure and services of public transportation).

By the early 1970s, however, when the number of cars in private hands topped 250,000 and constituted almost 90 percent of all personal cars, the chances of offering a genuine alternative to the "Western" pattern had been reduced to nil. Although economic-technological inertia is an important consideration, we would be mistaken to believe that it alone could explain the blurring of systemic boundaries when it came to basic patterns and tendencies of consumption. In the societies of state socialism, where the middle classes (the state-dependent *Bildungs-* and *Statusbürgertum*) were the main beneficiaries of the consumerist turn of the 1960s, where the party-state's elites were commuting between their homes, workplaces, and dachas in the latest models of Mercedes cars, and where even lower-level officials enjoyed and used privileges to jump ahead of commoners in the lines for private cars, the West was not merely a "mirror" where contrasts and comparisons could be seen. However, many discourses of systemic identity had to insist on construing the West as the constitutive other, on mapping it *without,* and on representing it as socialism's past, the Occident was also part of the self; it asserted itself *within,* and appeared to be *ahead* rather than *behind.*

State-socialist socioeconomic modernization followed deliberately and programmatically the universal standards of technological and economic success. In this respect it had never transcended, nor aimed beyond, the material culture of capitalism—rather, it defined itself as a faster, because more rational and more efficient, path in the same direction. Thanks to its early, strong productivist bias (economic and discursive) toward pacifying societies that had been exploited, oppressed, and harassed during the Stalin years and toward satisfying the middle classes (particularly the political class), the feeble attempts in the late 1950s and the early 1960s to define new socialist forms for modern everyday life and consumption, to develop an alternative, socialist "mode of life," remained unfinished. Later, the efforts of the Khrushchev years were altogether abandoned. The retrograde nature of the Brezhnev era in this respect is manifest in the nervous and brutal reactions of these regimes, particularly against those who tried to use a Marxian platform to discuss problems of alienation, everyday life, and human needs and to present arguments

for and ideas of social experimentation in order to promote the development of alternatives to (capitalist) consumerism.[9] Due to the discursive and policy vacuum thus created, the Occident could assert itself also in the dreams, desires, values, and practices of various social groups.

Having been to a great extent the child of and shaped by the standards and patterns of the Occident, the rebellious project of socialism not only failed to be "antimodern" (which it never wished to be), it also failed to provide a workable way toward an alternative modernity.[10] It lost the race for modernity as it failed to assert its systemic exceptionalism by offering viable alternatives for people's everyday life. The result was aptly summed up in a joke that circulated in Budapest in the late 1980s: "*Q:* What is socialism? *A:* It is a particularly long and painful transition from capitalism to capitalism." Remarkably enough, what makes this joke really funny is its sarcastic resonance with the language of the master narrative of socialism.