

CHAPTER 1

CZECHOSLOVAK POST-STALINISM

A DISTINCTIVE SPACE FOR SOCIALIST VISIONS

The ideology of renewal was not liberalism in the sense of mere modifications to an old structure, nor in the sense of a creeping transition to western conceptions [. . .] but increasingly aimed toward finding a Marxist solution for the new problems of modern society in the spirit and in favor of a socialist alternative.

—LUBOMÍR NOVÝ

This book examines the ways that new forms of socialist modernity were conceptualized during the post-Stalinist era—in the second half of the 1950s and in the 1960s. After the demise of Stalinism, Czechoslovak intellectuals within the Communist Party realized that the primary challenge they were facing was not merely the further development of socialism, which would lead to communism, but a need to reformulate the entire socialist project. Thus, post-Stalinist intellectuals gradually abandoned the Marxist orthodoxy and began searching for new interpretations of classic Marxist works that would provide an adequate conceptual framework for solving contemporary problems. While other research has focused on the history of communist reformism with its culmination in 1968, and therefore more or less subsumed intellectual activities into political developments (H. Gordon Skilling, Galia Golan, Vladimir V. Kusin), our book presents post-Stalinist thought as an autonomous sphere. In our analysis, the post-Stalinist intelligentsia's thought, with all its richness and diversity, emerges as a world of varying socialist visions.

The period between Stalin's death and 1968 was long considered a transitional era wedged in between the “heroic” Stalinist period of building socialism and the exhausted, empty form that arrived in the 1970s and 1980s under the name of “actually existing socialism.” Only

recently have we encountered approaches that attempt to capture the autonomous nature of post-Stalinist thought, and our book builds upon this trend. However, in contrast to other researchers, we do not see the dominant trait of post-Stalinism as a turn to subjectivity (Anatoly Pinski), or as indecision based in a tension between the legacy of the past and the advent of a new socialist future (Pavel Kolář); rather, we see its projective character. Thinkers of the time engaged in critical analysis of the present in an effort to help society achieve a socialist future. Therefore, we do not understand post-Stalinism primarily as an era of “thawing” (Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd) or as a mere rejection of the past (de-Stalinization), but as a search for new paths and possibilities that aspired to direct socialism onto a new developmental trajectory.

We derive the interpretation we arrive at in this book from the crisis of Stalinism as a particular variety of socialist modernity. As readers will see in this chapter, we therefore follow the line of research exemplified by Stephen Kotkin, which understands the perspective of modernization and modernity as central for interpreting Stalinist socialist projects. As a theoretical innovation, we draw upon the periodization of modernity introduced by Peter Wagner, whose approach to Stalinism as a form of organized modernity allows us to identify specific problems that the post-Stalinists encountered in the second half of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s. In our understanding of the crisis of Stalinism in the 1950s, we interpret it as a reevaluation of the Stalinist forms of organized modernity that manifested in the Eastern bloc countries not only at the economic and social levels, but even in Marxist thought. Although it has been widely recognized that Stalinism was an ideology of modernization (and Kotkin as well as Wagner have promoted this view), the details and intellectual ramifications of this identification have not been studied in depth in a Central and East European context.¹

An emphasis on the intellectual essence of Stalinism allows us to understand the richness of post-Stalinist intellectual efforts applied to overcoming Stalinism and using a better, more appropriate Marxist theory. It is crucial that the post-Stalinists criticized not only the “dogmatism” of Stalinist Marxism-Leninism but also the entire Marxist orthodoxy in the form that had crystallized after the Second International. The post-Stalinists reproached Marxist orthodoxy for having intellectually stagnated within the confines of industrial civilization, for having upheld scientific objectivism, or, sometimes, for having an utterly erroneous conception of dialectics.

In our view, post-Stalinism was also characterized by a special dualism. Although post-Stalinist Marxist reflection did overcome

Stalinist thinking and create a distinctive field of thought, its relationship to modernity was not so transgressive. Thus, in our estimation, the post-Stalinist intellectuals' critical approach had its limits, and rather than overcoming organized modernity, post-Stalinism represented its consummation. In other words, our book demonstrates that post-Stalinist intellectuals were not concerned with rejecting the socialist modernizing product, but with a critical reevaluation of its Stalinist type, and they sought new points of departure for a new post-Stalinist modernity.

Our analysis is based on a qualitative reading that allows us to conceptualize the Czechoslovak case, which we also consider unique in its way. While other researchers have focused on individual figures (Satterwhite) or dedicated their investigations to a certain area of the period's intellectual spectrum (James H. Satterwhite, Vítězslav Sommer, and Egle Rindzeviciute), we distinguish three general intellectual trends that determined the distinctive nature of Czechoslovak post-Stalinism. The first is Marxist humanism, which oriented its inquiries toward the problem of human praxis.² Next, we introduce the trend that we term "techno-optimism." As the name suggests, its proponents place science and technology at the center of their reflections. Finally, we identify a very distinct current that has been nearly forgotten in Central and Eastern Europe, which we call "dialectical determinism" because its advocates attempted to dialectically reconceptualize social and historical laws.

While some researchers have set the period Marxist humanists and expert techno-optimist intellectuals into opposition (Satterwhite, Sommer), we demonstrate that despite their partial differences and emphases in distinct areas, both of these currents were concerned with developing a concept for a new socialist modernity, and that despite their dissimilarities (focusing on art vs. technology), they both arose from the same intellectual substrate. The uniqueness of the Czechoslovak case was determined by the coexistence of these three contending yet intertwined intellectual groups. In Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, East Germany, and even in the Soviet Union, we can find the presence of these trends to varying degrees (for instance, humanists in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia; determinists in the Soviet Union, and techno-optimists across the entire region); however, we believe that there was no state in the Eastern bloc where these three groups were all as fully developed as and coexisted in the same way as in former Czechoslovakia.

In our view, using the Czechoslovak example allows us not only to demonstrate how post-Stalinism followed upon the previous era and

how it reckoned with the past but also—and primarily—what kind of original visions it gave shape to. We defined the main actors in our treatise as members of the party intelligentsia (i.e., experts who held party membership cards). Our interpretation is based mainly on the production of intellectuals who were oriented toward the humanities and social sciences: in particular, philosophy, history, sociology, and sometimes aesthetics. Others were active in period cultural and political journalism, that is, these thinkers came from the part of the party spectrum that was trying to analytically grasp the Stalinist past and their contemporary post-Stalinist present, on the basis of which they were modeling visions of a socialist future.

At the same time, we do not intend for this book to serve only as an analysis of the singular Czechoslovak case, but also as a testimony of post-Stalinist thought in general. We start with the assumption that despite the partial differences, and in view of certain limitations, the model of post-Stalinist thought presented here can be considered paradigmatic for the other states of the Eastern bloc as well. Although the post-Stalinist thought of the party intelligentsia had a different temporality and historical specifics in Central and Eastern Europe, we are still convinced that it can be defined using the same parameters.³

THE CONTINUITY OF STALINIST MODERNITY

Many interpreters claim that Stalinist modernization represents a deliberate strategy by which backward countries could attempt to catch up with and, in exceptional cases, even overtake the most developed countries. Moreover, this form of “progressive modernization” contains a key ambition that distinguishes it from nonprogressive modernizations—the attempt to build just and egalitarian societies.⁴ We agree with these researchers on two points: first, that strong tendencies to centralization and bureaucratization can be understood as a necessary operational mechanism without which the Stalinist modernization project would have been impossible to implement; and second, that the analysis should not be focused on Stalin as a personality, but on the operational and often radically violent processes that the Soviet form of modernization initiated. This model has been expressed by Domenico Losurdo as a “developmentalist dictatorship.”⁵

The term “dictatorship” itself is often overused, and the phrase “socialist dictatorship” refers to the stable socialist regimes of the Eastern bloc. In our usage, “dictatorship” does not label any kind of “autonomous” type of regime with a regular political-legal structure, but a specific set of conditions within the framework of this structure itself, which

always has a transitional character. Although the Soviet Union was not a regime of this type at the political and legal level in the 1930s, it is certainly possible to talk about a great deal of instability and movement at the social and economic levels. For this reason, Sheila Fitzpatrick and her protégés speak of a “Stalinist revolution,” which in and of itself asserts a transitional state. By contrast, we use the phrase “state socialism” when referring to regimes in the Eastern bloc, which, except for the events of 1956 and 1968 and the establishment of Stalinism at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s, displayed a great degree of stability.

We thus arrive at a certain pitfall in defining post-Stalinism, which is the uncritical extrapolation of the scholarly literature about Soviet Stalinism to the other states of Central and Eastern Europe. While from the perspective of the history of the Soviet Union, the period at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s can accurately be termed “late Stalinism,” in Central and Eastern Europe this was actually a period of revolutionary Stalinism in the sense of the concept of a “dictatorship” as sketched out above. In the first case, it is possible to describe a post-Stalinist stabilization that followed the revolutionary upheavals of the Stalinist dictatorship, and in the second, it is possible to speak about a stabilized society that flowed smoothly into post-Stalinism.⁶ Furthermore, if the concept of “thawing” is apt for the Soviet Union because it corresponds to a certain loosening of already-established institutional-political frameworks that can be traced back to 1952 at the latest, in Eastern Europe the era of post-Stalinism is connected far more frequently with the previous period in the sense of an incompleteness, or rather the culmination of processes that had been initiated earlier.⁷ The different dynamics of social development in the Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe can be traced through the institutional and social changes that accompany the transition from a people’s democratic stage in socialist-type regimes: for example, the completion of transformations in the areas of collectivization of agriculture and the establishment of forms of socialist ownership took place in Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 1950s, whereas in the USSR, these changes had already taken place twenty years earlier.⁸

At the same time, in the context of the different forms of development in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, we also have to emphasize that after World War II it was precisely the Soviet version of modernity that became for communists the model of progress.⁹ However, in some cases, the reason was not only the drive to catch up economically and remedy “backwardness,” but also devotion to the USSR as a

model for the level of political and state institutions, educational system, solutions for what were referred to as “ethnic questions,” and so on.¹⁰ Therefore, at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s, even in states of the Czechoslovak type, where the industrial sector represented a significant percent of the country’s overall production, we can trace the way Moscow was admired as a natural center of civilization from which progress spread to the peripheries. The legitimacy of this solution was also derived from the stability of the Stalinist regime in this period—it had proved able to overcome both inner turmoil (through the Stalinist lens of the political trials of the 1930s) and the external threat represented by the German invasion. The slogan “The Soviet Union—Our Model” was thus not necessarily understood only as the compulsory adoption of externally coerced norms, but also as a nod to the legitimacy and hierarchical primacy of the Soviet variant of modernity.¹¹ Even though regional specifics were ultimately repressed, it does not mean that this form of modernity was in all regards imposed from above (i.e., under the direct tutelage of Moscow). External pressure for Sovietization was combined with a multilevel mobilization of local societies.¹² We believe that this perspective will help us better understand the essence and historical progression of post-Stalinist thinking, as well as the way it worked to overcome Stalinism in the Eastern bloc—and especially in Czechoslovakia. Stalinism as a particular version of modernity became its paradigmatic application in these regions.

For our treatise it is important that the Stalinist version of modernity began to be thematized by communist intellectuals who had often taken part in the previous Stalinist revolution. If it is possible to speak about some kind of “sobering up,” it consists precisely in understanding the end of Stalinism as a viable, progressive, and modernist project. The economic, political, and ideological crisis in the countries of the Eastern bloc during the 1950s clearly illustrates that the Stalinist variation of modernization was losing steam and becoming unsustainable. We can interpret the so-called critical or reform discourses in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s that were reacting to this crisis as a symptom of it, but at the same time also as an attempt to find a new progressive starting point.

Naturally, we are not claiming that in comparison with Stalinism, post-Stalinism represented as a dissimilar alternative as Nazism and Stalinism versus liberalism; nevertheless, since the very beginning, post-Stalinism has been framed by multileveled criticism of the previous era. Yet, at the same time, it is generally true—or it was at least in the beginning—that the criticism of Stalinist modernity was not

conceived of as a refusal of it,¹³ but as an attempt to overcome it dialectically. Stalinism was going to be subjected to investigation at the level of naming and locating its errors, after which the creation of a qualitatively new form of post-Stalinist modernity would follow.¹⁴ In 1956 the philosopher Radovan Richta proclaimed that “the main goal is not to clarify all the mistakes of the past, it is primarily about the approach and especially about the future.”¹⁵

In many regards, we thus find inspiration in the words of Marshall Berman, who, in connection with Karl Marx, spoke about hopes that the “scars caused by modernity” were to be “healed by means of a more complete and rigorous modernity.”¹⁶ For our treatise, we slightly paraphrase this proposition and we argue that post-Stalinism was attempting to “heal the scars of Stalinist modernity through a more complete and consistent socialist modernity.” At the same time, we agree with the sociologist of modernity Peter Wagner, who says no ideal form of modernity exists, nor does it have one correct historical implementation—there are only various interpretations that have been implemented in history. More specifically: capitalism, parliamentary democracy, and state socialism are just interpretations of modernity, and do not represent the only possible and ultimate solution.¹⁷

It is Wagner's periodization of modernity that allows us to refer to the individual stages in the historical formation of modern society. The crisis of the “restricted” liberal model, which was created as a reaction to the great political revolutions of the emerging modern era (especially the French Revolution), represented the first of them. Its essential characteristic was that although it preserved many of the (bourgeois) freedoms and ideals that had been fought for, at the same time it also denied them because it excluded certain groups: first, the lower social classes, women, and mentally ill people, then, as the era progressed, the limitations were spread further on the basis of national, ethnic, and cultural criteria. The demise of the liberal model was primarily caused by these limiting measures that left entire groups of citizens at the margins of society, so it was unable to fulfill its own promises of universal freedom, social harmony, and a more democratic form of government. The general instability of (post)liberal regimes inspired the rise of new types of political, economic, and ideological practice, which, instead of the liberal emphasis on free associations among individuals (let us add, among those who enjoyed a privileged class position), emphasized controlling and organizing people into larger bodies, whether corporations, oligarchies, mass-based political parties, or trade unions. This is what provided the basis for what Wagner termed “organized modernity.” In

the context of this problem, it is important that Wagner understands Stalinism (or, in his own term, “Soviet socialism”) as an accelerated, condensed form of organized modernity, or—more precisely cited—a form that is “more organized” than its Western counterpart.¹⁸ In Wagner’s view, the difference between them is not essential in nature; it is a matter of their degree of organization.

However, we do not consider the period after Stalin’s death as a kind of fading phase of organized modernity, which after a sobering up from Stalinism would gradually disappear entirely, as the term “thawing” semantically implies. On the contrary, we perceive a twofold relationship to Stalinism as organized modernity: we claim that in post-Stalinism there was both a criticism of this Stalinist type of organized modernity and a process of its reorganization that refrained from repudiating “organizing” in the sense of strong institutional frameworks that were determined by the Communist Party and state. On the contrary, organization was to be achieved (by the proclamation of socialism) and preserved, even though it changed through various reform discourses. It is precisely this moment that establishes the distinctive nature of the post-Stalinist era.

Post-Stalinism as an independent phenomenon was defined recently by Pavel Kolář in a book published in German: *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche* (Post-Stalinism: The Ideology and Utopia of an Epoch). In his work, Kolář speaks of this era as an intermediate phase (*Zwischenphase*) between Stalinism and late socialism, which is torn between the unpleasant legacy of the past and the alluring promise of the future.¹⁹ In his view, this position “in between” is the cause of post-Stalinist vacillation, indecisiveness, half-measure solutions, and the like. Although Kolář’s approach is innovative in many ways, here it indirectly endorses the historiography that describes this period as naive and internally conflicted.²⁰ In contrast, our approach is based on different inspirations from the social sciences. Johann P. Árnason, referring to Max Weber, and even more to works by Cornelius Castoriadis and Alain Touraine, draws attention to the tension in modern societies caused by an “absolutizing demand for rational mastery” on the one hand, and individual or collective direction toward autonomy and creativity on the other.²¹ We believe that in a figurative sense this tension can be considered a typical feature of the post-Stalinist period, when the Stalinist type of rationality is not replaced by a refusal of rationality as a principle, but themes of various forms of creativity and creative acts, whether in the spheres of science, art, or philosophy, come to the fore. While Kolář attributes indecision to post-Stalinist think-

ing, a projective visionary wager placed on another, albeit problematic, continuation of the socialist project is the dominant common theme in our conception.

At the same time, we claim that respect for rational organizing in Czechoslovakia, similarly to that in Western Europe, began being called into question only at the end of the post-Stalinist era, when the legitimacy of state-socialist organized modernity dissolved in the events of 1968 and various forms of autonomy were articulated (here we mean both radical leftist and liberal intellectual alternatives). We assign the end of post-Stalinism to this turning point, which in our estimation, at least in Czechoslovakia, ended hand in hand with the crisis of organized modernity in 1968. Despite the numerous ways in which the “order” after 1968 evinces continuities with the previous period, for example, in the techno-optimist approach to socialism,²² in many regards its basic settings did in fact change. However, the “actually existing socialism” of the 1970s, and 1980s was lacking one of the defining traits of post-Stalinism, which was a critical approach to its own establishment and momentary political and social practice.

POST-STALINIST REFLEXIVITY

In his treatise about the relationship of state socialism and modernity, Johann P. Árnason argues that the all-embracing and all-enlightening ideology “limited the role of reflexivity in social life: the ability to confront problematic aspects and consequences of modernizing processes was undermined by a priori restrictions.”²³ Although elsewhere he speaks about the Czechoslovak case and the reform process of the 1960s as an attempt to escape this rule, he does not further elaborate on the topic, and he concludes with a remark about the inevitability of the end of such an experiment.²⁴ Similarly, when Peter Wagner defines organized modernity, he describes one of its key characteristics with the concept of “conventionalization,” which corresponds to ideas of legibility, manageability, and classification of the social world. When this principle is implemented from above, which is important for our analysis, the system’s ability to react to processual problems is overshadowed by themes of governance and control. Wagner adds that after some time, when conventionalization has been achieved, the socially conditioned character vanishes from the thoughts of the social actors, and everything is “representing some natural order of reality,” leading, in his opinion, to the reification and naturalization of social phenomena.²⁵

In our understanding of post-Stalinism, we follow Árnason and agree with the way he attributes a key role to reflexivity in modern

society; however, we disagree with his evaluation of state socialism as a monolithic period, and we claim that one of the most important aspects of post-Stalinism was its ability to be self-reflexive.²⁶ To Wagner's description of organized modernity we add that even if the process of conventionalization in Central and Eastern Europe was pushed from above through party and state interventions, the post-Stalinist era is characterized by questioning the function, meaning, and goals of individual constituent aspects of the social world as well as the system itself.²⁷ Even the achievement of conventionalization in itself in Central and East European states (for instance, if we admit that the official proclamation of socialism in Czechoslovakia in 1960 meant a truly institutional and legislative framing for a system of organized modernity) was accompanied by a certain degree of reflexivity. This trend gained momentum during the 1960s and culminated in 1968. In other words, we claim that post-Stalinism, in contrast to the previous era and the period of "actually existing socialism" that began after 1968, displayed a marked capability for (self-)reflection, which was manifested primarily at the level of various intellectual and artistic activities among the ranks of party intellectuals.²⁸

The question naturally remains as to where this reflexivity came from. In his work analyzing modern society and seeking its revolutionary subject at the end of the 1960s, the sociologist Alain Touraine used the concept of "historicity." This term expresses the internal capability of a given society for understanding knowledge (in the broader sense) as the main production factor or "as the force directly transforming the state of nature" of the social world.²⁹ Touraine's concept can be summed up as a society's awareness of its own history and willingness alongside the intellectual and technical capability of entering into this process. Stated in his words, Touraine says the historicity of human society is linked to a "a symbolic capacity that enables it to construct the system of knowledge together with technical tools which it can use to intervene in its own functioning."³⁰

In his analysis of modern society, Touraine applied a basic premise that was also articulated in Central and Eastern Europe in various formulations after Stalin's death: human society is not formed and does not endure only on the basis of adaptations to an environment, for the sake of its own reproduction, or because of the functioning of iron laws of history; instead, this happens because it has the ability to "work on itself"—the society produces itself.³¹ Touraine claims that it is necessary to distinguish the adaptation, functioning, and reproduction of society from its production.³² We could even say that it is exactly in the moment



1.1. Robert Kalivoda holding a banner (Cabinet of Philosophy, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) at a May Day parade, sometime between 1954 and 1957. Copyright Eva Kalivodová.

when historicity is identified with its own organization and functioning (in our case, by the Communist Party and state) that the society finds itself in a crisis. This gives rise to initiatives to overcome this condition, including mobilizing all the various resources and capacities needed—thereby also creating new forms of historicity (new models of knowledge and of accumulation and utilization of resources). This perspective enables us to grasp the extent to which various intellectual, scientific, or organizational initiatives and proposals are not simply another element of the functioning of society, but at the same time they are also not located outside of it in the position of a distant observer or reformer. Quite the contrary; historicity is inherent to a certain type of conflict (conflicts of classes, groups, or interests) within society.³³ We assume that the crisis situation described above corresponds to the condition in which state socialism found itself after 1953, and in our conception post-Stalinism is an example of a new form of historicity.

Touraine's emphasis on society and its material structure and productive mechanisms is crucial for our treatise on the history of state socialism. For it is no coincidence that the most elaborated deliberations that reflect on the past, present, and especially the future of state socialism have arisen from institutions that were originally founded by Stalinist revolutions; in our case, the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (extant since 1952/1953) and the individual artistic associations that brought together party intellectuals and artists.³⁴ Let us add to Touraine's discussion of socialism as a combination of radical accumulation of the means of production and control that this process led to the creation of an institutional basis, which later—at the latest after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR—enabled self-reflexivity with a capability for social self-production (i.e., historicity).³⁵

If we are to answer the question of the origin of post-Stalinist reflexivity, we cannot avoid the period shifts in the approach to knowledge in the process. As David G. Rowley aptly remarks, in the era of establishing Bolshevik doctrine, epistemology was not actually a “mere” philosophical discipline but primarily a question from which political action was derived.³⁶ Stalinism was consistently based on the Leninist idea of the party as the avant-garde of the working class, which was supposed to have exclusive access to knowledge and therefore had the prerogative to change reality as soon as it recognized something that needed changing, by means of political action. Already for Lenin, as Daniela Steila has noted, “only a leadership that firmly possessed the unique authentic truth could lead the masses to ‘victory.’”³⁷

Whether we consider Stalin himself or the closest circle of party leadership to be the main epistemological actor within the framework of Stalinism,³⁸ what is certain is that it was the originally Leninist idea of the immediate connection between knowledge and politics that dominated during the Stalinist era. Naturally, this does not mean that post-Stalinism had no need for scientific knowledge as a basis for making political decisions. Quite the contrary, as indicated by the formation of teams of experts at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. It was a new relationship between knowledge and politics, and a way in which decision makers could gain knowledge about the society and then apply it. Whereas Stalinism implicitly assumed an immediate connection between knowledge (the dialectical laws of history) and its own politics, in post-Stalinism this relationship acquired a mediated nature, which guaranteed a certain autonomy for both spheres.

In this regard, Tom Rockmore remarks that for Lenin the question of knowledge was based on “the Cartesian search for a universal method to secure certain knowledge,” and he claims that philosophy was abandoned in favor of a strongly scientific standpoint.³⁹ For Rowley as well, the elevation of Marxism, or rather the party’s position on science, was vital for the revolutionary movement, because the “objectivity” of cognized reality guaranteed that politics itself (revolutionary actions) would not be seen as “subjective-idealist” decisions; moreover, this scientism relieved actors of any individual moral responsibility.⁴⁰ We add that the Stalinists’ conception, which placed party resolutions on a par with science, had to adhere to Lenin’s theory of knowledge.⁴¹

In his study of Aleksandr Tvardovskii’s thought, Anatoly Pinsky considers “epistemological autonomy”—which he says arose based on a new reflection on “the source of truth”—as a distinction between post-Stalinism and Stalinism. Here, this means a shift from a privileged access to the truth for party bosses to the individualization of this category. Now it was no longer just the party or its leadership, but also the “I” as a knowing subject that can look at reality.⁴²

In accordance with these conclusions, we consider the change of the epistemological subject to be pivotal. However, at the same time, we postulate that this movement led to the creation of the inner richness of post-Stalinist thought. The dominant position of the party as the main center of thought was simply weakened by the proliferation of thinking subjects.⁴³

In his study, Pinsky uses the apt metaphor of a “sea of uncertainty” in which the political headquarters remained the flagship, but the smaller vessels were sailed by intellectuals who “claimed the same right of dis-

covery.”⁴⁴ We would like to clarify that a typical feature of post-Stalinism was that besides members of the party apparatus, scientists, experts, intellectuals, and artists also demanded an epistemological approach to reality and claimed the right to express themselves (first on the party’s turf, but later also in public) about the current state of socialism and its further transformations. Most of them continued to consider themselves Leninists and did not question the party’s leading role in politics.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, many of them still considered party avant-gardism as historically outdated (in the spirit of revolutions of transformed social conditions) and they articulated an idea that was typical in a post-Stalinist context: that ordinary party members, and not only the party leadership, had something to say about matters of socialism.⁴⁶ This was not a radical change of position or a step outside the system, but the previously sacrosanct truths mediated by the party leadership no longer bore the seal of incontestable objectivity.

In this context, Pinsky argues that “for Tvardovskii and other writers and critics, an allegiance to the party elite remained, only now they did not conceptualize that elite as epistemologically unique.”⁴⁷ In other words, scientists, experts, intellectuals, and artists declared that their standpoints were in conformity with the official party line (“the question of whose side to stand on is fundamentally not a question, I have been satisfied with the party since the beginning of my activities”).⁴⁸ Hand in hand with this, they also naturally refused categorical submission to official resolutions.⁴⁹

The watering down of universally binding, imperative truths mediated by the party leadership began in Central and Eastern Europe after Stalin’s death. This trend is illustrated very well in a wide range of debates that took place at that time about the relationships between science and art, and between politics and ideology. At the same time, there was also much talk about cognitive abilities, political insubordination, and even a certain degree of autonomy for science and art.

INTERNAL PLURALITY

This proliferation of epistemological subjects and the resulting capability for reflection derived from it influenced the nature of the post-Stalinist intellectual world. The difference between Stalinism and post-Stalinism naturally manifested in the different nature of the regime itself—the weakening of centralism, the possibility of using violence, inspections, and so on; however, for the purposes of our treatise we are more interested in changes at the level of the party’s theoretical approach (i.e., official Marxist-Leninist thought). While Stalinism—in the spirit of