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The Velvet Revolution of Land and Minds

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A sociopolitical revolution is a complex phenomenon, taking place in history, implying legal, political, and human transformations. The term "revolution" itself comes from Latin, where it is built as *Re-volvere*, literally, to roll back. It has both been used to designate the closure of a cycle as in the return of the celestial bodies (eleventh century), and that of "great changes in affairs," and especially politics (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries). The term is thus etymologically built on a tension between what regularly comes back, and what is connected to a major rupture (Rey, 1998, p. 3238). Given its political and historical importance, the term has become a notion in the social sciences. Hence, the following attempt to give a definition:

> Providing one clear-cut definition of revolution proves hard due to their historical variability. One particularly important distinction, however, is between social and political revolutions. Social revolutions involve sweeping change in economic, social, cultural, as well as political institutions... Revolutions that involve only the transfer in political power are known as political revolutions. (Harrison, 2014, p. 1673)

As it has been the task of sociologists, philosophers, political scientists as well as of economists to define the concept in the light of the variations of causes, shapes, speeds, and outcomes of revolutions in human history, I will leave further definition problems to them. I will work with a simple understanding of a Revolution as sociopolitical phenomena – deliberately combining the two categories above – as in "any major social and political transformation, sufficient to replace old institutions and social relations, and to initiate new relations of power and authority" (Blackburn, 2014). However, I will also bear in mind the fact that a revolution means something that simply revolves, that is, comes back to its initial position after a long trajectory.

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What can sociocultural psychology say about such phenomenon? Sociocultural psychology has given itself as goal to understand humans as beings of culture (Bruner, 1990; Cole, 2007; Valsiner, 2012, 2014a). Such perspective has invited us to consider people within their webs of social relationships, as they interact with material and symbolic objects, in specific social and cultural settings, as well as their relation to less visible cultural phenomena such as fiction and religion. A sociopolitical revolution is, from that perspective, simply another type of cultural phenomena (Valsiner, 2014c). As any other, it is deeply historical – it happens at a specific moment of people and groups' lives, it unfolds through time, and mostly demands an acceleration of changes normally taking places; it is determined by activities and meanings conferred to situations by people; and it is socially and culturally situated. The main challenge, for cultural psychologists, is however to be able to combine an analysis of changes in the social and cultural field – for instance, the revolution that changes a political or economic system – and an analysis of how people experience the world (Ratner, 2012). For, if our sociocultural analysis still claims to be a psychology, it has to give us access to how specific persons live these changes, and how sociocultural changes and human development mutually constitute each other (Hviid, 2015; Rosa, 2007; Zittoun et al., 2013).

In this chapter, I propose to examine the so-called Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989. I will briefly sketch a history of the country, and present the revolution itself. I will then propose a few theoretical elements which, from a sociocultural psychological perspective, allow us to read the conditions in which the Velvet Revolution took place. Looking at some of its consequence in people's lives, I thus hope to identify some features of a sociocultural psychology of revolution.

A Very Short History of the Czech Republic

Situated in the middle of Europe, between Germany, Austria, and Poland and what today is Slovakia, Czech Republic was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With three major rivers taking their sources in the country, mountains rich of minerals, plains, and hills, the region was rich and well developed: representing 21 percent of the lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was responsible for 60–70 percent of its industrial capacity (Machonin, 2000, p. 107). Composed of the regions of Bohemia, Moravia, Czech Silesia, and Slovakia, Czechoslovakia was created as independent country in 1918 after World War I. Tomášs G. Masaryk, a former philosopher and educationalist, became president of a democratic First Republic. The state became one of the most

successful industrial countries of the region, with its very good public transport and educational system, its factories producing metals, shoes (Bat'a), weapons (Škoda), as well flourishing arts and architecture.

With the rise of Hitler to the power in neighboring Germany in 1933, the course of history drastically changed. Misusing the principle of self-determination defined by the Atlantic charter in 1941, Hitler steered nationalistic movements in the Sudeten lands, large border zones of Czechoslovakia (about a third of the country's surface) in which a German population were installed since the thirteenth century as part of the development of the land. The conflict in a bilingual population of Czech and German origin escalated, and was used as a pretext for the policy of appeasement which was finalized as part of the Munich agreement in September 1938. Czechoslovakia was strongly advised by its European allies to renounce to these lands without military resistance, in exchange of the guarantee of Czech sovereignty over the remaining of the country. The Sudeten lands were annexed by Germany, and six months later in March 1939, Czechoslovakia was fully turned into a German protectorate. This episode let a painful memory to Czech citizens – that of, although having been ready to resists, losing their sovereignty – and an enduring feeling of having been betrayed by Western allies. The ruling of Czechoslovakia allowed Germany to access the rich resources of the country, as well as to use it as platform to the East.

In September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland thus starting World War II. Czechoslovakian territories were "liberated" in 1945, from the south-west by the American Third Army under the lead of General Patton, and from the North an East by the First Ukrainian Front under Marshall Konev. Following the Yalta agreement in February 1945, as part of the postwar settlements, Czechoslovakia fell in the zone under Soviet influence, and thus behind the Iron Curtain (e.g., Cornej and Pokorny, 2004). Postwar Czechoslovakia has then known various periods, starting with a quasi-democratic period from 1945 to 1948, year in which the Communists took over. A very harsh Soviet-style collectivization and restructuration of the society immediately followed, with arrests, confiscations, political executions, concentration camps, forced labor, torture, etc. After the end of the Stalinist cult in 56, the communist policy progressive loosened its grip on society, which led to the Prague spring in 1968, a very creative period for arts and culture. This was broken down by the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw pact in 1968, which installed the process of "normalization" – aiming to "normalize" the communist state of affairs, this time replacing physical violence against citizens by psychological and economical pressure. Finally, in the 1980s, in parallel with other movements in the eastern bloc (Perestroika in the USSR,

Solidarnosc in Poland, etc.), a combination of popular movements and political transformation allowed for the so-called Velvet Revolution – the end of communist rule and the election of Václav Havel, a dissident theater author and philosopher, as president.

Tensions between Czechs and Slovaks present since the creation of the country resulted in the peaceful division of the country in two, the Czech and the Slovak republics on January 1, 1993. Since that, Czech Republic continued its orientation toward liberal democracy and joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. Currently, Czech Republic has a rapidly growing overall economy although inequalities also increase within the overall population (Birčiaková, Stávková, and Antošová, 2014; Kahanec et al., 2012).

The Velvet Revolution

The Velvet Revolution – *sametová revoluce* – took place in 1989 in Czechoslovakia; it is often described as an exemplary nonviolent revolution, made by people under the leadership of the intellectual figure of Václav Havel, and bringing the end of communism in Czechoslovakia. That revolution is both a political and socioeconomic change, and a return to a democracy, as the country had known during the twenty years of the First Republic under the other intellectual leadership of Masaryk.

The events have often been summarized as follows (Radio Prague, 1997; Wikipedia, 2015). On November 16, 1989, a student demonstration took place in Bratislava to commemorate the fiftieth birthday of the death of the student Jan Opletal on November 17, 1939, followed by persecutions of students and the closure of universities in Czechoslovakia by the Nazis. The demonstration attracted a great number of students; the police was present but did not intervene. A similar event grouped fifteen thousand students in Prague on November 17; this time, the police ended up the demonstration with violence, beating students. This immediately caused a massive reaction: theater and arts went on strike, later joined by factory workers; public discussions were organized; and a Civil forum (*Občanské fórum*, which had a Slovak equivalent), defending nonviolence, was created. The latter asked the government to resign. Massive demonstrations (up to five hundred thousand people) followed in the next few days, followed by more general strikes. One of the very iconic scene of that time is that of these hundreds of thousands peaceful demonstrants on Prague's main square, Wenceslas square – the equivalent of the Champs-Elysees – all shaking their keys. Eventually, the president Gustáv Husák announced his resignation on December 10.

Obviously, the revolution was not only "caused" by the peaceful demonstration, how romantic the idea might appear. External economic and political games were getting to a tipping point, and internal dynamics were active for forty years.

On the external side, the world balance was changing in the late 1980s, with the end of the Cold War, and overall a general weakening of the Soviet influence. The Perestroika had started mid-1980s under Gorbatchov; following this closely, the Czech population started to express more openly its discontent or its support to dissidents such as Václav Havel; students demonstration had started in January 1989, and a series of gathering repressed by the police had started on a regular basis on the center of Prague, while demonstrants became bolder with time (Drury, Reicher, and Stott, 2012; Zantovsky, 2015). Early November 1989, East Germans escaped to West Germany through the Czech embassy, and then the Berlin Wall collapsed on November 9. Hence, on the European map, the loss of communist influence in Czechoslovakia was part of a more general change, probably anticipated if not supported by the need of the communist countries to join the general economical market. In the light of these changes, the Communist authorities could not decide to react violently to the November demonstrations (Cornish, 2012; Zantovsky, 2015).

On the internal side, forty years of communism had let Czechoslovakia exhausted, and its previously flourishing economy was now bloodless. The general climate was depressed after the many waves of severe repression, intimidation, arrests, censorship, blatant inequalities, etc. This is what we now need to closely consider. Before doing so, I will need to introduce a few theoretical concepts to work with.

A Sociocultural Understanding

Addressing a revolution from a sociocultural perspective requires identifying theories or models appropriated to articulate collective and psychological change. Here, I will draw on a series of simple principles.

First, a revolution can be described from a developmental science perspective as change that demands a massive reorganization of a given system (Valsiner et al., 2009; Zittoun et al., 2013). A social, political, and economic transformation cannot be explained in terms of linear causality (Kohler, 2014); rather, it is made possible through complex configurations of events and facts. Such complex transformations have been described in the social sciences in terms of catalytic phenomena. "Catalysis" is a chemical reaction that occurs in specific conditions in a temporarily bounded system, where an accelerated reaction takes place

thanks to the presence of a catalyst, which first brings elements to synthesize into temporary compounds, before constituting a new substance, while leaving the catalyst unchanged (Valsiner, 2014b). Catalysis can be used as a metaphor in psychology (or as a "nomad concept"; Kohler, 2014, p. 33). Dynamic changes, as well as the catalysis metaphor, can be used at different levels of description – social, interpersonal or intrapsychological (Cabell and Valsiner, 2014; Kadianaki and Zittoun, 2014; Valsiner and Cabell, 2012). Here, we will use the metaphor to describe a sociocultural change.

When talking about psychological transformation, I will use the notions of "rupture" to designate events perceived by a given person as questioning the taken-for-granted of her experience, and of "transition" to name the developmental dynamics hence generated and by which the person adjust her conduct to the new situation, until a new balance is found (Zittoun, 2006b; Zittoun et al., 2013; Zittoun et al., 2012). Here as well, of course, there is no single causality: what a person perceives as change does not "cause" psychological transformation; certain conditions facilitate change, and some elements can play the role of "semiotic regulators" and catalysts – for instance semiotic resources (Kadianaki and Zittoun, 2014).

However, in order to combine an analysis of changes at a sociocultural and at a psychological level, we need to identify both a frame to articulate these phenomena, and a common denominator – a "substance" that circulates at both level and through both levels. The general principle that articulates both phenomena can be that of "dialogicality." Inspired by Bakhtin, it mainly designates "the capacity of the human mind to conceive and communicate about social reality in relation or opposition to otherness" (Marková, 2003). Dialogism itself and it can be conceived of as ontological, epistemological, and ethical stance (Zittoun, 2014). From a dialogical perspective, we can conceive how not only verbal utterance, but more generally, any movement of mind and the flow of consciousness is responding or anticipating other events, and how these are also always related to inner-dialogues, relations to present or distant others, cultural elements, social representations, and more diffuse values and discourses, in their respective social and cultural anchorages (Grossen, Florez, and Lauvergeon, 2014; Grossen and Salazar Orvig, 2011; Zittoun and Grossen, 2012). What is the "substance" of the dialogues, what circulates from social representations to mind, is made out of signs – it is of *semiotic* nature (Valsiner, 1998, 2001, 2006; Zittoun, 2006b, 2009, 2011).

With these two theoretical principles – dialogicality and semiosis – we have the means to theorize the mutual constitution of the politics and

the mind. In other words, we can grasp dynamics by which social and political systems, shaping the semiosphere (Lotman, 2000) – expressed in discourses, structuring everyday life, organizing the urban space or the nature of formal and informal relations – also progressively shape and guide individual psychological life. In a well enough functioning society, semiotic streams circulate from society and its institutions to people's lives and back. People internalize some aspects of the shared culture, and in unique ways constitute their personal culture. This is the basis of their externalization in that society and can participate to its evolution (Valsiner, 2007; Zittoun and Gillespie, 2015a).

However, for some minority groups, or in some forms of society, there is a mismatch between shared and personal cultures: the society proposes norms, values, and discourses that people cannot internalize, or that are too contrary to their personal culture, and also often denies the latter. People's personal culture and system of values thus becomes dissonant with the collective and shared one. Although we all experience such dissonances, these are very clear in the case of migration (Gillespie and Zittoun, 2013; Lawrence, Benedikt, and Valsiner, 1992; Schuetz, 1944; Zittoun, 2006a; Zittoun and Gillespie, 2015b), and also, in case of radical political change and, as here, in the case of totalitarian state. In addition, the societal organization and its institutions also exerts physical and symbolic power on people, constraining their access to semiotic resources, limiting or forcing actual conduct, or deny recognition.

This raises the question of how people can develop a meaningful action in such environments. For this, we need to introduce to more concepts. The first one is that of "engagement":

> In existential philosophy the concept of engagement was introduced aiming to reinstall personality development in the concrete world. When engaged, human beings got "involved in the situation, thereby changing it, and thus creating a future for themselves as persons" (Lübcke, 1999). In a developmental perspective, engagements can be seen as situated zones of potential development. It unites potential interests of the child [or the person] with certain aspects of the environment... In engaged situations human beings move and are "moved." (Hviid, 2008, p. 184)

Engagement thus designates that what moves people, that is, dynamizes their conduct; it allows conduct to make sense to the person in a given situation, and be future oriented. In that sense engagement is one of the conditions of development.

"Imagination" is the second notion we need to understand what is at stake for people in given social and political environment. Imagination is

> disengaging from the here-and-now of a proximal experience, which is submitted to causality and temporal linearity, to explore, or engage with alternative, distal experiences, which are not submitted to linear or causal temporality. An imagination event thus begins with a decoupling of experience and usually concludes with a re-coupling. (Zittoun and Gillespie, 2016, p. 40)

Imagination is a core psychological dynamic, which allows enriching our daily life, in daydreaming, anticipating, creating, or remembering (Zittoun et al., 2013; Zittoun and Gillespie, 2016). The material of our imagining is given by personal past experiences, experiences of others, cultural elements, or any available semiotic materials, newly recombined and enrich in unique fashion by one's experience (Vygotsky, 1931; Winnicott, 2001). Imagination can bring us to new conduct – building a shelve or going on holidays – but also, be the means to resist imprisonment or labor camp, or bring to social change (Zittoun and Gillespie, 2016). Conversely, totalitarian states precisely aim at controlling people's access to resources so as to constrain imagination (Marková, forthcoming).

From a sociocultural perspective, then, dialogical dynamics allow understanding the mutual constitution of society and mind, through the circulation of semiotic streams. In most cases, there is some degree of homology between shared and personal culture. Yet also, there can be discrepancies which can be more or less acceptable. We also see that people's conduct needs to follows their engagements for life in society to make sense; imagination can in that sense either support these meaningful engagements, or at the contrary, deploy is alternative realities, detached from these. These few ideas are the basis of our more psychological reading of the dynamics leading to the Velvet Revolution – which will of course only address some aspects of its complexity.

The Amphibian Society

In order to understand the revolution that allowed Czechoslovakia to restore its democratic tradition, one needs to examine the social organization in the country under communism and its psychological implications. In order to do so, and guided by the ideas outlined above, I draw on a series of texts by Czech social scientists, novelists and commentators.

My main argument, based on coinciding various authors' descriptions, is that the at the dawn of the Revolution, the population was not only generally depressed because of forty years of deprivation of civil rights, as in any totalitarian state. Moreover, a long-standing irritation had developed, first because people's real engagements had been systematically

unacknowledged, denied, if not destroyed, and second, because people as well as institutions had to adopt a publically suitable discourse and actions to cover basic needs and avoid further problems, while developing in private an alternative life infused with their imagination. This can be shown by following three aspects of life in society: people's possession, people's engagements, and people's discourses. In each case, the social system creates conditions in which people cannot internalize and make theirs the societal values, and a state of dissociation develops.

First, Mlčoch, an economist forbidden during the communist period, reads the evolution of the country as a transformation around the semi-formal institution of ownership. As he summarizes here, the historical sketch above could also be read as a story of organized systematic dispossession:

> During the last three generations in the former Czechoslovakia – that means from its very beginning – great number of changes and reversals in ownership relations, violent interventions into property rights took place. The terrible instability of institutions – of all of them, but of ownership institutions particularly – is probably one of the most important features of the history in our countries. I can only mention here the first land reform from the First Republic when the land of feudal landlords was expropriated. The Second Republic and the Protectorate were stigmatized with the impact of the Nazi ideology, the robbery of the Jewish and also Czech possessions and their transfer into German hands. Then the post-war period with the first Nationalization Decrees, with the violent transfer of the German population – the expulsion and expropriation of Germans, the confiscation of possessions of war traitors and collaborators. Now we get to the February 1948, to the communist Nationalization Decrees, to the massive expropriation with which the process of realization of the Marxist ideology started. (Mlčoch, 1995, p. 144)

Very concretely, it means that whatever people or families had developed and accumulated over time as result of work, interest, or capacity, thinking about their future of that of their children – a house, a sewing machine, a cow, or savings – was taken away from them during communist years. People who grew under the Nazi Germany and lived their adult lives under communism thus remember having lost two or three times their own goods and savings. This situation was among others reflected on housing issues (Šmidová, 2000).

Second, along the same line, the socialism imposed in Czechoslovakia by Soviet Russia denied people the right to choose their life trajectories according to their interests and abilities. People who did not comply with the regime usually ended up working in unqualified manual occupations regardless of their expertise (e.g., doctors, artists, or scientists working as porters, responsible of heating rooms or destroying garbage)

(e.g., Hrabal, 1993; Křesadlo, 2015; Viewegh, 2015). Conversely, people with lower expertise but strong allegiance to the Party would get higher positions, with collective responsibilities. Also, young people were oriented toward studies according to the need of the economy, not their own interests or engagements; in some case access to education was denied to them as retaliation against their families. At a collective level, this brought to an economic and cultural "stagnation" (Machonin, 2000, p. 112). At a more individual level, many people resign to dull life occupations, while investing "hobbies" or side activities; many invested in their flourishing "cottage life" that allowed parallel modes of sociality (Reidinger, 2008); others could get very depressed or simply alcoholics. A minority of the population engaged in "dissident" activities – that is, refused to renounce to their freedom of thinking and speech – risking repression for themselves and their relatives. For instance they published Samizdat (forbidden texts circulating on homemade press), sent their texts abroad (Zantovsky, 2015), planned informal gathering to debate and learn, together or with foreign intellectuals (Day, 1999), or organized and attended forbidden or undergrounds concerts and arts (Hagen, 2012). (Of course, there was still a portion of the population satisfied with these arrangements; also, people who grew as children these years have very often good memories of the collective activities organized for them by factories or state companies.)

Third, at a more organizational level, in companies and public institutions, "planning was an extensive cooperative game based on a deep dichotomy of actual and official rules" (Mlčoch, 2000, p. 31). Hence, on the one side, the discourse proposed was taking the shape of the socialist language of planning for the collective good; on the other side, the real socioeconomic game was a structure of informal power and networks, with its privileged and subordinated. Thus, here again, the economy progressively was dissociated between an official discursive game, and actual practices – where, in everyday life, people could survive on the basis of informal networks and shadow economy.

From such a reading, it appears that Czechoslovakia in the 1980s was tired and affected by forty years of a regime which demanded, for most people, a double mode of existence. The public life was for many a game to be played, minimally as a way of lip service (e.g., having a communist membership card in order to accede higher education) or as much more sophisticated game. People's actual engagements, that is, their existential interests and emotional commitments, took, for the most part, informal or private channels: hobbies, informal networks, and close relationships. People's imagination could also mainly develop through lines forbidden by the society and its institutions, through forbidden music,

capturing TV channels from the West, or hoping to escape or for the end of the Regime. In his novel showing the moral compromising to which the regime led people, Křesadlo thus uses the expression "amphibians" to designate a dual-mode "lifestyle of those who participated in church singing as well as communist society" (Křesadlo, 2015, p. 217) – and the expression can probably be extended to other modalities of double life. It is against this double life that dissidents and especially Václav Havel, drawing on a Czech moral tradition going from Jan Hus to Jan Patočka, developed an ethical posture demanding to "live in truth" (Kohák, 1989; Marková, 2008; Zantovsky, 2015).

Hence, our sociocultural reading highlights a state of society where people function at two contrasting levels, and where the collective values and principles do not reflect and cannot guide people's engagements and imagination. There is thus dissociation, or a gap between societal values and personal culture, shared meaning and personal sense making. Paradoxically, it is precisely this gap that creates the space in which, in the right catalytic conditions, change can take place. In other words, revolution can be seen as a form of societal catalysis, resulting from a long cultivated inner-societal disruption. Here, the geopolitical conditions of 1989 offered the environment for the catalytic process. In that sense, the demonstrations of the Velvet Revolution were the temporary compound of such longer process, and Václav Havel played the role of catalyst.[1] The catalysis eventually resulted in a new societal order and political power – the reinstallation of a democracy.

The Revolution and Ruptures in Life Trajectories: From Amphibian Lives to the Big Pond

At a sociocultural level, the Velvet Revolution had relatively clear outcomes: the Communist power abdicated, after having installed Václav Havel at the presidency of the country. Havel called elections soon after and was indeed confirmed in its role by the population. He soon constituted a government of former artists and intellectuals, mainly dissidents, which had now the hard duty to fully transform a society. In inner politics, this implied to change the social system, the whole economical system, the cultural life, the education, etc. (Zantovsky, 2015). This period has thus rightly been called that of societal transformations (rather than transition) (Machonin, 1997).

[1] Václav Havel was described by his biograph as playing the role of "'carbon,' a chemical element capable of linking with many others to create a compound of irresistible strength, filled with contradictions yet stable enough to set in motion the momentous transformation that led ahead" (Zantovsky, 2015, p. 299).

At the level of people's lives, however things were not so clear: "the direct participants [of the social change], however, only perceive muddled and badly demarcated social events, which surprise them with ever new uncertainties"(Kabele, 2000, p. 126). Filling lives with uncertainties, the revolution was also the cause of many ruptures – the loss of a job, the end of certitudes, the possibility to travel or to become one's own boss – and thus initiated many transitions. In that sense, the corollary of our previous argument would be that the transition in people's life, triggered by the revolution, offers them the occasion to reunify their double life – to move away from an amphibian life.

Drawing on the longitudinal documentaries by Elena Třeštíkova, *Manželské etudy po dvaceti letech* (studies of marriage twenty years later, 2006), documenting the everyday life of six couples, married in the same town hall in Prague in 1980, and followed until 2005 (Třeštíkova, 2009), I have tried to analyze the nature of the transitions experienced by people following the Velvet Revolution (Zittoun, 2016a, 2016b; Zittoun and Gillespie, 2016). I here indicate some elements that support the idea that the dynamics generated by the revolution allowed, for some, to develop a more integrated life.

Although the life conditions of the six couples were very similar at the beginning of the married life – precisely because of housing and work conditions – what distinguished mostly the six involved young men were their hobbies.

In what appears as a form of compensation for the lack of freedom on the vocational front, most of the men in the couples have substantial hobbies, for which they spent a certain numbers of weekly hours. Hobbies open new spheres of experience that partly escape to the constraints of political guidance. They are also spheres in which playfulness and creativity can be let free . . .

Pavel from the very beginning is doing theater, where is play and sings, and hockey in the winter and football in the summer. He will keep doing theater all his life and keeps doing regular sports as well. His wife, Ivana, likes her husband's hobbies and assist to the theater pieces. She does a bit of gym as well.

Václav likes to work with wood – furniture, construction; outside of his work as teaching architecture, he develops a workshop. After the revolution, he becomes the owner of a large furniture store; his wife Ivana supports him. She, on the other side, develops all kind of skills – she knits, paints small frames, does small objects with various materials and fabric; for a short period after the revolution she will open a boutique for such object but will have to close it.

Jiří collects taps of bottles which he exchanges with colleagues, and plays cards with them (it has no significance upon the couple as he and Marcela early divorce). She, on the other hand, likes to take care of horses, and attends country concerts and hikes.

Antonín likes to build up cars; he competes on a rally, and also learns to take care of animals to improve the couple's food income. Mirka, his wife, just sees

these hobbies as taking her husband away from the chores and the daughter. She is disappointed by his interest for farm animals and resents him for his passion for cars, and eventually forbids her husband to continue rallying. She mainly mentions her pleasure in dancing. As an older couple they both take care of a small garden.

Stanislav is extremely absorbed in building electronic artifacts – transistors, small computer, and telescopes – and also in his motorbike. He keeps on such leisure all his life, building his own hi-fi stereo, a low consuming house... His wife, Zuzana, complains as the hobbies prevent him to participate to house chores, discussion and family life – but never seems to ask him to reduce his hobbies. She on the other hand only mentions reading some young people's magazine, and later in her life, watching TV series.

Vladimír develops and interest for photography next to his work, and the couple decides that the wife, Zuzana, will bring the main income while he can develop his skills – first trying to enter the FAMU, a prestigious art school, then working as a freelance photographer. (Zittoun, 2016a)

These hobbies took a very different importance in people's lives after the revolution. In effect, the transition in people's lives allowed for many the possibility to explore how to reunify diverse aspects of one's experience, with various trial and failures.

The skills developed as hobbies in men's youth under communism will become central in their later professional life. Václav, who likes working with wood, opens as furniture shop; Antonín, who likes playing with car pieces, will open a garage and later becomes specialized in selling wheel rims; Stanislav fabricates as satellite which enables him to capture foreign channels, and so learns German – which eventually will bring him to be translator; Vladimír who likes photography turns it into his job. Pavel discovers billiard in 1995, falls in love with the sport, and eventually turns it into his main occupation. All these men will, at one point or another, say that they are lucky enough to do their "dream work." (Zittoun, 2016a)

Of course this short summary of our analysis of six life stories (Zittoun, 2016a, 2016b) has no value of demonstration. Also, many people found themselves in difficult situation after the revolution, and felt missing the means to understand, if not participate to, a liberal society defined by very different rules than life under communism. This for instance has brought many parents to feel difficulties to support their children discovering a liberal, democratic society as young adults (Macek, Ježek, and Vazsonyi, 2013; Roberts, 2008). However, the fact is that in these six life stories, like in probably many others, the revolution liberated very powerful engagements in activities so far taking place in the shadow of society, as amphibian activity. These supported strong enough imagination of oneself in the liberal society, to bring people to engage strongly in new activities. This in itself supports our initial point: in effect, for

such engagement to surface, these must have been active and repressed for long.

If the Velvet Revolution can be seen as the expression of these long-repressed engagement and imagination, it seems that the modalities of communism established in a society that had a long tradition of democracy and used to be governed by intellectual figures (Holý, 1996) contained the condition of its own destruction. The following interpretation can thus be proposed: in the right catalytic conditions, people's need to find some coincidence between inner life and societal value, personal and shared culture, finally generated a series of reactions that allows for deep social transformation and personal transitions.

Thinking through Revolutions

Each revolution is unique. Here, by retracing the history of Czech Republic, my aim was to show the underlying and accumulated streams of meaning and values that shaped people's lives: the memory of having been a flourishing democratic state, or the feeling of betrayal by former allies. These constitute the cultural and historical conditions in which forty years of communism were imposed, denying people's engagements and obliging imagination to develop in the margin of society – which eventually triggered the Velvet Revolution, a process of social transformation that could be described as catalytic, with its specific choices of nonviolence and truth as ethical and political values. Such sociocultural reconfigurations triggered transitions in people's lives, who could renounce to an "amphibian" experience toward a more integrate life.

However, some elements proposed for this analysis could be used to read other situations. The sociocultural framework sketched here proposes to consider both social and cultural conditions in a given environment, and the conditions in which people live their daily life. From a dialogical perspective, these are deeply related, and constitute the frame within which meaning and dynamics of recognition take place. Our proposal is to pay attention to the possible discrepancies between people (or subgroups) and the general cultural guidance – values, promoted actions, etc. We also considered people's engagements and imagination as core psychological needs. The question thus becomes, is a given societal environment offering people the possibility to freely develop their life trajectories according to their engagements, and space for develop imagination in such a way that it enriches life in society? If not, a disruption can progressively develop, which is likely to create a space for change. How this change takes place then becomes politics and history.

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