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## Ambivalent Discourse in Eastern Europe

Despite the general consensus that transition in Eastern Europe has reached its completion, it seems more difficult to prove on the level of everyday life. In the context of East European transitions, some of the major questions refer to the way this process, the events, and the decisions become interpreted in everyday life; do the values of the new political/economic system become internalized? What is the legitimacy of the political, economic, and social ideals of short-term plans proposed by the elite? Internalization and legitimacy depend only partly – and not always – on the activity of opinion leaders. Both before and after 1989 they attempted to adapt “Western” models to local conditions – an attitude and a practice difficult to adopt in everyday life. Here, improvisation rather than adherence to a model or ideology drove everyday activity and discourse, often without a larger perspective and frequently leading to disappointments. Specific, historically, developed conditions coupled with the constraints of everyday life led either to success or, on the contrary, to obstruction of opinion leaders.

Internalization presupposes polarization, oppositions that in everyday life must be dissolved by individuals or groups. Good and bad (evil), merit and need, private enterprise and public fairness, ideals and pragmatism, etc., are choices everybody has to make. In everyday life one either suspends the tension between dichotomous or dichotomously understood values, or develops frames of interpretation that make cohabitation with their contradictions possible. More specifically, in modernizing Eastern Europe the polarization between “us” and “them” or between the private and the public sphere took certain local, specific variations. For example, both before and after 1989 the tension between the “official” and the “non-official” spheres, or between “our” and “their” ethnic (national) group was – and continues to be – of major importance, even if the meanings of these terms changed over time.

The point remains that the importance of such terms comes not from some “national” or “worldwide” politics, but from everyday life, determining the behavior of common people, their worldview, their social orientation, and their identity.

The pragmatic dissolution of conflicts usually requires the individual or community to transform a system of values and norms formally perceived as valid and coherent. This usually involves considerable effort, and some discomfort, as such changes endanger the real or assumed coherence of our worldview and ourselves. This thus raises the question, what happens, if—for a variety of reasons—the choice, or the reconciliation of the various polarities is hindered over a long period of time<sup>1</sup> by the lack of legitimate institutional forms that could promote such an option, or a compromise. How does such a situation impact the values of everyday life and the conduct of individuals? Do individuals then try to dissolve the tension of conflicts? And if so how?

As a first approach, Katherine Verdery’s theory on the split identity of East European subject’s, which led, according to her, to the incoherence of values and norms of behavior, will be discussed. It will be shown that in this region, in everyday life, such a polarized identity does not always result in chaos, or in moral double standards, but rather in a coherent, pragmatic life-style validated by the everyday social milieu. Some examples of trespassing between official, dominant and “opposition” discourse, a practice developed in state socialism, will be given. These will be treated on the one hand as forms of silence and struggle with silence, and on the other hand as “pedagogical” exercises.

Her thesis will be demonstrated through an analysis of the (quasi-) opposition discourse developed in Transylvanian Hungarian circles. Three examples will be given: poems allegedly written for children by Sándor Kányádi before 1989, the activity of the Party Committee for Supervising Performances (based on the minutes of this body), and an artistic performance “in honor” of the Romanian Communist Party’s 60th anniversary. The conclusion will try to connect the problem of ambivalent discourse to that of parrhesia.

According to one of the most interesting interpretation, the roots of the ethnic conflicts that erupted in Eastern Europe after 1989 can be traced back to the bipolar personality structure characteristic of communism. According

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<sup>1</sup> For the problem of enduring transition, see Árpád Szakolczai: *Reflexive Historical Sociology*. London: Routledge, 2000.

to Katherine Verdery<sup>2</sup>, communism dichotomized the moral, political and social world by constructing a totally antagonistic enemy for itself (the enemy of the state, of the people, of the regime, etc.). Even if everyone did not accept this worldview, this dichotomization became the mechanism by which the subjects' identities were formed and reproduced. Quite apart from the expectations of the regime, however, the "others" from whom they differentiated themselves in everyday life were not the "capitalists", "the West", or the "internal enemies", but the official elite itself, (official rhetoric, culture, etc.). And thus, the "us" developed exactly in opposition with the official "them". Values were turned upside down in the private sphere. And, in the public sphere, positive values became evil. In this situation, the self could not be affirmed openly, and thus, the identity of East European subjects was characterized by a certain duplicity: a "public self" that presented itself according to the requirements formulated by those in power, and a "real self", secluded into private life. But the real self, developed in opposition with the public self, relied for coherence on the official self. Bi-polarity became constitutive of a social person. The end of the regime provoked a crisis of self-conception, in the disappearance of the "them" against whom the self had been constituted. Nevertheless, Verdery claims that the bipolar mechanism of identity-construction continues to function as part of the social person even after 1989 and the creation of new dichotomies have been created. The real self needed a "them" in order to maintain itself. The new "other", according to Verdery, found its form in the stranger, especially ethnic groups. This lies at the heart of post-1989 nationalism.

Bi-polarity certainly explains nationalism, the ongoing creation of borders, and many other more or less intolerantly self-constituting practices. But this statement needs qualification in two respects.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, the private/public dichotomy was not so polarized. For Verdery the two spheres are sealed off from each other, resulting only in antagonism. Such a position, labeled "liberal" by Benn and Gaus,<sup>4</sup> can be criticized from several standpoints.

<sup>2</sup> See Verdery, Katherine: Comment: Hobsbawm in the East. *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1992, and Verdery, Katherine: *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1996, Chapter 4: *Nationalism and National Sentiment in Postsocialist Romania*, 92-97.

<sup>3</sup> The following argument does not deal with another major problem raised by this analysis; namely that certain conflicts have a historical aspect – they took shape long before state socialism.

<sup>4</sup> Benn and Gaus Introduction. In Benn, S. I. – Gaus, Gerald F. (eds.): *Public and Private in Social Life*. London: Croom Helm, 1983.

First, from a somewhat historical relativist point of view, it can be shown that the boundaries between public and private change throughout time. Second, public and private can interpenetrate (or become identical). Third, some cultures do not have such spheres, or if they do, they have significantly different meanings. Moreover, as the variety of viewpoints suggests, distinctions used in academic disciplines are equivocal themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Two observations need to be made concerning this case. On the one hand, that the two spheres existed in this region and were recognized in everyday life as more or less separate entities does not need debating. Interpenetration (as if the Communists penetrated and governed every part of the private world) is not the point, but rather the fact those values of the private sphere frequently appeared in the public one, and vice versa. One's frame of reference could interpret situations in the other, hence, creating ambiguity and ambivalence. On the other hand, further investigations should take into consideration that the borders between the two have changed a great deal after 1989.<sup>6</sup>

Without a proper description of how the public sphere worked, and its relationship to the private, one is stuck in a Manichean world with little resemblance to the real one. It is impossible to present here an overarching picture of the (Romanian or Transylvanian) public and private sphere and the relation between the two. Nor does it seem possible, in such a limited space, to describe how "time" solved the problems caused by polarization. The question up for examination deals only with their problematic nature and how this complex connection found resolution, as dichotomy in their moral world never reached perfection. It seems that rationalizing every action and situation according to a strict bipolar value system just was not possible. Everyday actions and situations were much more inconsistent. In many cases,

<sup>5</sup> This topic cannot be discussed in detail here. On the problematic relationship between the public and the private sphere and how categories change in time, see for example Benn – Gauss, idem; Maier, Charles S. (ed.): *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 1987; Coontz, Stephanie: *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families 1600-1900*. London and New York: Verso, 1988; Castiglione, Dario – Sharpe, Leslie (eds.): *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*. University of Exeter Press, 1995; Weintraub, Jeff – Kumar, Krishan (eds.): *Public and private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> See on this issue Biró A. Zoltán – Gagyí József: Román-magyar interetnikus kapcsolatok Csíkszeredában (az előzmények és a mai helyzet) [Hungarian-Romanian interethnic relationships in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc]. *Antropológiai Műhely*, Vol 1, Nr. 1, 1993.

rationalization evaded bipolar evaluations, or played them off each other. Indeed, many issues were rationalized away. Strangely enough, this logical inconsistency helped people (in their own point of view) develop a *valid and consistent* personality which strove to correlate the private and the public into a more or less unitary whole (in spite of logical inconsistencies); a personality *both morally, and pragmatically* acceptable that made sense to themselves. Consequently, the development and reproduction of an acceptable personality demanded resolution of the tension between the public and private.

“That values and/or frames of interpretation became extremely context-bound presented the most important consequence of this mechanism. As a result, from the point of view of the external observer the behavior and mentality of “East Europeans” appears incoherent, hard to understand, or simply outside common morality in many cases. This conclusion coincides with a major point in Verdery’s argument; one she considers represents an outcome of the “socialist identity structure”:

“Self-actualization in socialist Romania seems to me [...] to have been much more situationally determined than North Americans find acceptable, such that people could say one thing in one context and another in another context and not be judged deceitful or forgetful or mad.”<sup>7</sup>

Although we note the same phenomenon, our conclusions diverge. Verdery sees this as a sign of a divided self. In the following, however, I will argue that often (but not always!) efforts are made in everyday life to reunite these “selves” to create an acceptable whole even if the results, from an external point of view, seem unsuccessfully. From the external point of view, they fail to create a coherent, consistent value system, behavior and mentality.

The array of events, actions, and situations of everyday life withstood rationalization according to a bipolar, coherent system of values. Roles and frames of interpretation retained some flexibility. Ambivalence could mean, for example, the procedures of distancing oneself from the official role. The roles of “us” and “them”, for example- the “bureaucrat” and the petitioner, actually offered remarkable space for free maneuvers. Minimal gestures, winks, or one or two seemingly negligent, “unorthodox” expressions helped one exhibit a different image of one’s self. Or, take for example, the Hungarian party official who helped a co-national acquire a flat. Rather than considering this an official procedure in which he/she took part as an anonymous

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<sup>7</sup> Verdery, 1996. 96.

bureaucrat, this often occurred as a personal act, implying help offered on the basis of national solidarity (a Romanian applicants often bribed such officials for similar purposes. In this case, the gesture could be rationalized either as a necessity imposed from above, or as understanding toward a person in a difficult situation, thus making nationality irrelevant, and/or making one feel more “objective”, “tolerant”, “humane”). Such acts became very important constitutive elements of one’s self-image and offered important narratives/stories repeatedly told in private circles.

In this case, role distancing took place not only within the institution itself, but outside as well.<sup>8</sup> In many situations, people attempted to convey their role within the institution; a role caught up in the meanings of another system of values. In such a case, he/she not only acted as an apparatchik, but as a Hungarian, or simply a “decent human being” (“rendes ember”). The array of frames making the two compatible should be stressed. And thus, such a system of double (or even multiple) standards evaluating actions did not – and does not- involve cognitive dissonance. Just as devoted Christians can be thieves, it did not complicate one’s life, but simplified it, helped constitute an identity acceptable for oneself. The frames of interpretation did not tend to seek accordance with general values and norms. On the contrary, the situation, action, or person justified the interpretation frame. One should take into consideration that in everyday life people most often came into contact with bureaucrats of a low, or a middle rank. The relationship usually involved making an application, understood as a bargain. Bureaucrat often refused by referring to the harshness of rules, thus transmitting a personal responsibility to the rules, the laws, to higher officials, or even to the regime. Thus, evaluations were mixed: one could be a “Hungarian and a Communist pig” (in the case of a refusal), or “a Communist, but still a decent person, a good Hungarian” (in the case of a successful bargain). Both were common expressions.

The following aims to present some elements of trespassing between official and unofficial, permitted and forbidden speech developed during state socialism.

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<sup>8</sup> On this see Goffman, Erving: *Role Distance*. In *Encounters*. New York, 1961

*Ambivalent discourse: official, dominant, oppositional  
The silence of the intellectuals and the silence of power*

Peter Burke, in his essays on the social history of silence, considers knowing when and how to keep silent as relevant as when to and what to say.<sup>9</sup> The issue at hand, however, is neither silence as a rhetorical device – as it has been used in literary or argumentative works<sup>10</sup> – nor silence resulting from a personal decision, but institutionally defined silence. Its meaning may vary according to place, time, or speaker, but most importantly from the point of view of our problem, such public silence proves more important than silence in private life.

The silence and/or inactivity of intellectuals before 1989 were often as visible as their public activity. It was salient, and it was frequently discussed in private circles. The activity of the intellectuals, their “life in a calling” under an official aegis, was coupled with inactivity, silence concerning the regime – a silence as obvious as the public side of their activity. It was obvious because it was expected and often as talked about as their actions. Expression and silence were both notoriously part of the pre-1989 social world. And, both were linked not only to their “mission”, but also to “pragmatism”.

Actually, one has to differentiate among at least three types of “silence” in pre-1989 Eastern Europe. The first took for granted public space, the unspoken common background of knowledge that is the basis of any communication.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in Eastern Europe this also made the transmission of certain information circumventing censorship possible. Although the cultural bureaucrats did their best, this was rather difficult to control. The second was a voluntary silence, the reasons for which do not require further development here. The third type consisted of an involuntary silence, which could not be broken even in the most hidden spheres of private life because of the lack of intellectual, conceptual means; the tools necessary for a properly argued account of society.

It is a common mistake – probably linked to theories of totalitarianism – that the *motivation* of the rhetoric of Eastern European power in the 1970’s and 1980’s equals that of the 1950’s. The two phases were totally different. In

<sup>9</sup> Burke, Peter: Notes for a Social History of Silence in Early Modern Europe. In Burke: *The Art of Conversation*. Polity Press, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> In ancient rhetoric, the issue was discussed referring to Cicero (“reticent”), or Celsus („obticentia”). Quintilian called it aposiopesis. See *Institutio oratorica*, IX, 2, 54–57.

<sup>11</sup> Berger, Peter L. – Luckmann, Thomas: *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books, 1966; Burke, idem.

the first period of Communist rule, a portion of the political elite hoped to slowly convince the population their cause was just and best suited for everybody. But in its last 15-20 years (more or less), the apparatus lost confidence in the just character (and the viability) of its ideological program. Consequently, the function of rhetoric radically changed: no longer sought to convince, to “enlighten”, to explain, or to mobilize.<sup>12</sup> The very fact that it could say whatever it wanted, without being obliged to pay attention to the possibility of being refuted (by “reality”, or by a generally hostile public opinion) demonstrated the strength of their position, and that (almost) nobody had the courage to disprove it. Those resorting to this type of discourse knew very well that nobody believed them. And *this* was a major characteristic of their power: they could say anything, without anybody believing it, and also without anybody having the power to challenge it. They had the unique luxury of not caring what people thought or believed. The spoken word was not manipulation, but a rubber truncheon waved at everyone- a gesture.

Talk about “reality” (i. e. what was seen, experienced as reality in everyday life) was prohibited, not only for the subjects, but also for those in power as well. But the type of discourse that had no connection with reality was not typical only of the “official” elite. The “opposition” was also free of the obligation to demonstrate or to mediate ideals toward the world of *practicalities*: the *gesture* was important, not the ideas, arguments, or concrete proposals. That nearly all widely spread pre-1989 opposition topics disappeared from the public sphere following the period of triumph demonstrates this.

### *Tricks used to avoid silence*

Totalitarian society seems to be the ideal terrain where the Gramscian concept of hegemony, respectively the division between dominant and popular culture can be successfully used. Yet, the distinction polarizing dominant and popular cultural spheres is not valid in the context of this argument.

First of all, power, in general and in particular, during the “socialist” period – never *created* culture, it only proposed, or tried to enforce a *cultural model*. Accordingly, before 1989, power did not produce “socialist culture”.

<sup>12</sup> See Tismăneanu, Vladimir: *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*. New York, Toronto: The Free Press, 1992. And Bauman, Zygmunt: *Dismantling a Patronage State*. In Frenzel-Zagórska, Janina (ed.): *From a One-Party State to Democracy: Transition in Eastern Europe*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1993. The latter claims that Communism collapsed because ruling elite lost belief in their order, and that society felt and observed this. One may add as a conclusion that this can explain the slackening of the zeal of the apparatus toward “converting” the population.



The question is how the elite reacted to the demands of the power. On the whole, one can say the reactions were mixed. The elite accepted it, adapted it, gave it form, mediated it, and reproduced it: but only partially. The intellectual (humanistic elite) who gave form to certain ideas, plans, and values formulated by the power elite created socialist culture. The public sphere, however, was not completely molded by the official ideal even in the darkest years. A thorough interpretation, one according to the official model, of social reality (including the private sphere) was never achieved in the public sphere.<sup>13</sup> If one considers topics from the point of view of permission, three variants can be distinguished. Aside from elements that were usually neutral (love<sup>14</sup>, nature, etc.), there were others that in certain periods, for specific reasons were more or less tolerated. And there was a third category of topics, and ideas that were completely forbidden. Often, the boundary between these realms was arbitrary, usually not fixed, and liable to change, for reasons not of interest here.<sup>15</sup> The discourse and the issues in the intermediate, and “tolerated” category, are more important because they can help one distinguish between dominant and official culture. The latter represents the model proposed by the power and its eventual “perfect” presentations and adaptations. The former tries to raise and circulate issues if not encouraged at least tolerated.<sup>16</sup> This category includes discourse that tries to present forbidden issues by encrypting the text, and demanding the public to read between the lines.

This type of ambivalent discourse – probably used in most regimes without freedom of speech for authors with unorthodox views – offers one of the major differences between official and dominant culture.<sup>17</sup> The most com-

<sup>13</sup> A similar view can be found in Zygmunt Bauman. According to him, there were two axes on which intellectual life in communist regimes was plotted. On the one hand, there was a systemic and social integration, which drew intellectuals “into direct engagement and competition with political power”. On the other hand, there was a regimentation of intellectual practices, and pressures to “assimilate centres of intellectual authority within the structure of officialdom.” Bauman, Zygmunt: *Love in Adversity: On the State and the Intellectuals, and the State of the Intellectuals. Thesis Eleven*, Nr. 31, 1992. 162. For the current, generally accepted view stressing on the regimentation, manipulation of society under socialism, see Tismăneanu, idem, for example on p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> That is, putting aside unpalatable love stories between tractor drivers and milkmaids.

<sup>15</sup> Periods of “liberalisation” were usually linked to the change of the secretary general of the party. “Freedom” certainly had a cost, for example, relaxing the analysis of certain domains of the past (e. g. the fifties), dissolved energies for other periods (like the present).

<sup>16</sup> There was a differentiation among people as well. Some were allowed to write on “hot” issues, while others were not; being “courageous” meant more than to have “courage”.

<sup>17</sup> Another pair of the opposition, dominant vs. popular, is problematic as well. If popular is everything outside dominant, could one call Havel a “popular author” because he was not “dominant” before 1989?

mon techniques of ambivalent discourse include: presenting the issue as a tolerated one, presenting the opinion of the ideological “opponent” accurately, objectively, or maybe even sympathetically, but then “refuting” it, as an “inimical” view, brutally inserting orthodox passages into a non-orthodox work<sup>18</sup>, and perfecting self-encryption where the piece is a unitary whole<sup>19</sup>.

Sándor Tóth presented a whole range of tricks used in order to avoid censorship in his work on Gábor Gaál, a Hungarian leftist philosopher from Transylvania. While the official ideologists and the censorship wanted to monopolize and distort his message and his personality, his disciples and friends did their best to prevent them. During the fifties- especially after 1953, Tóth claims, it was common to introduce references to the “Soviet example”, as the Romanian party apparatus did not want to de-Stalinize.<sup>20</sup> Another possibility when proposing the publication of a book was to hail it as a work putting in practice Zhdanov’s criteria of “good literature”, although the real goal aimed to publish a good book that most likely had nothing in common with such criteria.<sup>21</sup> Usually, papers and reviews had to introduce texts showing their loyalty to the party and its program. It was possible, however, to make these texts distinct by printing them separately at the beginning on different paper, with different characters, and even with a distinct pagination leading readers to understand that these texts were not addressed to them, but offered a necessary tribute to the censorship. It happened that such texts were not even included into the summary.<sup>22</sup> Especially when editing texts from the inter-war period (or earlier), one faced certain taboo topics, or expressions. In such cases one could simply delete the expression, and hope that the rest of the text could be saved.<sup>23</sup> The other alternative put all such texts and expressions into the endnotes as they were not seriously checked.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s works written together with Valentin N. Voloshinov or Pavel N. Medvedev offer some famous examples. See for example *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Mikhail Sholohov’s *Quiet Flows the Don* is a work written in the same vein.

<sup>19</sup> For this, see some of György Bretter’s works.

<sup>20</sup> Tóth Sándor: *Dicsőséges kudaraink a diktatúra korszakából. Gaál Gábor sorsa és utóélete Romániában 1946-1986* [Our glorious failures during the dictatorship: The fate and after-life of Gábor Gaál in Romania between 1946-1986] Budapest: Balassi, 1997. 66, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Tóth, idem, 57.

<sup>22</sup> Tóth, idem, 76. A similar technique was the usage of the so-called “locomotive” in reviews and newspapers: texts which could prove problematic were preceded by citations from the works of Ceaușescu; the tougher the text, the longer the “locomotive”. Often there was no connection between the two, but the engine managed to pull the carriages after it.

<sup>23</sup> Tóth, idem, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Tóth, idem, 164-165.

Aside from this arsenal of tricks, a book could also display some of the counter-methods deployed by the power in manipulating the work and opinions of personalities (mostly classics) that, for some reason or other were considered important for the regime. The most important methods included drastic, false reinterpretation of opinions by publishing so-called “selected” works that presented a biased image, by omitting major texts or leaving out certain phrases, and paragraphs.<sup>25</sup>

*A special case: critique aiming at education*

As these examples show, an investigation of structural silence is not so methodologically easy. Scholars have focused their study of the restriction of free speech within regimes on official discourse, although – on the basis of the hypothesis proposed – such analysis proves less fruitful than it may seem. On the one hand, they argue the debatable view that political events equal visible, so-called “major” events, leaders, politicians, etc., and on the other hand, they remain in an epistemological double standard. Leo Strauss has shown that according to mainstream philological rules in certain periods, one should not read between the lines, but confine him/herself to the explicit text.<sup>26</sup> It should be added that such respect is deliberately not granted to the dominant political rhetoric that is often expected to hide as much as it shows. As a result, the author’s wish is not respected in either case: the unorthodox would like to convey his/her message, but the interpreters do not find the methodological arguments to his/her wishes; the orthodox rhetoric would like the interpreters to take the message *prima facie*, but they have good reasons for not doing so. Obviously, this difference boils down to the fact that there can be no general standards for deciding whether a philosopher’s work, for example, is encrypted. Lessing’s view that all philosophers of antiquity offered an exoteric and an esoteric teaching, found in the same work, lost its appeal.<sup>27</sup> Nowadays, this presupposition – once a philological standard – is marginal.

<sup>25</sup> Tóth, *idem*, 123, 140–155.

<sup>26</sup> See Leo Strauss. I consulted the Hungarian edition: Strauss, Leo: *Az üldöztetés és az írás művészete*. Budapest: Atlantisz, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> See Strauss, *idem*, 33–37. The distinction seems to originate in 17th century freemason teachings. It was presented in the so-called “double doctrine”, according to which a religion might comprise an outer shell (the creed for the vulgar), and an esoteric inner truth (known only to the initiated). This approach, they thought, could help them in deciphering ancient wisdom. See Kidd, Colin (1998): “Men in Aprons”, book review of Piatigorsky, Alexander: *Who’s Afraid of Freemasons? The Phenomenon of Freemasonry*. *London Review of Books*, May 7, 1997.

And nevertheless, continues Strauss, there are periods in which one knows that texts were written and read with a general, common background and clues in mind. This is not the case in the modern period due to a fundamental change in the social role of men of letters that took place around the middle of the 17th century.<sup>28</sup> Before then, the gap between “wise men” and the “masses” was considered a basic element of human nature, and one that could not be bridged with education. Consequently, wisdom could be handed over only to disciples. The moderns, in considering the possibilities of education, seem to have had a more optimistic view of human nature. Publication thus did not only mean a simple presentation of one’s views to readers, but education aiming at the elimination of persecution. Writing and publishing with an educational purpose was seen as a contribution to the enfranchisement of people.<sup>29</sup> Reinhart Koselleck gives a thorough description of this type of critique, its context, and results.<sup>30</sup>

He hypothesizes<sup>31</sup> that the structure of Absolutism, rooted in the dichotomy of sovereign and subject, (between public and private morality), prevented the Enlightenment and the emancipation movement from seeing itself as a political phenomenon. Consequently, the Enlightenment became Utopian and even hypocritical because it saw itself excluded from sharing in political power. It also succumbed to Utopian contradictions that could not be resolved in practice, and prepared the way for the Terror and for dictatorship. He refines the argument by stating that it was only in certain countries (Central Europe, Germany, Spain, France, and Italy) that a type of Absolutism appeared which created a special type of Enlightenment. This, while trying to evade censorship and other chicaneries, was directed against the Absolutist claims of the sovereign ruler. Only inventing “ways of camouflage and mystification as well as other indirectly operative modes of behavior could

<sup>28</sup> Strauss, *ibidem*, 40–42. Strauss uses the term “philosopher”, but enlarging the category does not seem to contradict his intentions.

<sup>29</sup> Sándor Tóth’s book on Gábor Gaál shows us another reason for reading a text as if it were encrypted; respect for a certain person, and understanding for her/his fear. It is shown that after 1948 Gaál wrote nearly under constant menace. In Tóth’s view, the texts produced under such circumstances do not reflect one’s own ideas. If one is interested in what the author really wanted to communicate, then one should not look for the dogmatic views, but to the small, hidden elements showing his unique, individual character by presupposing that the text was encrypted and that there were secret ideas therein. See Tóth, *idem*, 56.

<sup>30</sup> Koselleck, Reinhart: *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*, Oxford, New York, Hamburg: Berg Publishers Ltd., 1988.

<sup>31</sup> Koselleck, *idem*, 1–2.

do all of which". Rousseau described this indirect method of political critique in the following manner:

Il tourne même avec assez d'adresse en objections contre son propre système, les défauts à relever dans celui du Régent; et sous le nom de réponses à ses objections, il montrait sans danger et ses défauts et leur remède.<sup>32</sup>

This had two consequences, of which only one was foreseen. On the one hand, it obliged the Absolutist State to respond to these new pressures and try to legitimate itself. This was only partly successful as critical arguments remained outside the cabinets where actual political decisions were made. As compensation, a progressive philosophy of history was elaborated "which promised victory to the intellectual elite, but one gained without struggle and civil war." The unforeseen consequence took form in the camouflage and mystification pervading the ideas of the Enlightenment.

The Absolutist State did morally emancipate individuals, but denied them public responsibility by restricting them to the private sphere. This inevitably led to conflict with a State that subordinated morality to politics. And consequently, the State had to stand an endless moral trial. After the dissolution of *ständische* societies, pressure to justify politics and morals without being able to reconcile the two remains the legacy of the Enlightenment.<sup>33</sup>

What connection linked the critique of the Absolutist State with this crisis?<sup>34</sup> The major problem was caused by the fact that while Enlightenment did conjure the crisis, it did not realize the political significance of its action. The reason for this lies exactly in the type of "mystificatory" critique practiced in which Utopian images of the future "caused the day's events to pale". Consequently, the critique provoked a crisis of which it did not know.<sup>35</sup>

The last element of Enlightenment critique is the importance it renders to the planning of history that becomes as important as mastering nature. This misconception is furthered by the Absolutist State, which makes the alienation of morality from politics inevitable. But in the planning of history, moral man, "a stranger to reality", considers the political domain as something that can only stand in his way, and which should be eliminated. Thus, politics is dissolved in Utopian constructs of the future.

<sup>32</sup> Rousseau: *Oeuvres Complètes*, tome 93, p. 100ff. See Koselleck, idem, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Koselleck, idem, 2-4.

<sup>34</sup> Koselleck, idem, 9-12.

<sup>35</sup> One can add that the whole situation also led to a mental-structural inability to cope with practical responsibilities.

Consequently, one can say that the major elements of Enlightenment critique and the Absolutist State's crisis encompasses the divorce of morality from politics, the individual's lack of power in the public sphere, both of which led to a philosophy of history that contained the moral, Utopian critique of both State and politics, the importance of technocratic thinking which proposed an end to politics, and a change of individuals into "useful collaborators" of the new social order.<sup>36</sup> One can add to these elements, a peculiar interest in *creating* a public suited for their utopian educational ideals.

This is not important in itself. The challenges the Enlightenment faced produced mentalities, attitudes, and behavioral patterns that survived the special circumstances of their appearance. The Enlightenment is not just our past, but also a "present that has passed".<sup>37</sup> This approach offers the opportunity to find in Enlightenment not analogies, but elements of our present.

#### *Hungarian ambivalent discourse in Romania*

Ambivalent discourse was also used at large in the Hungarian- language public sphere of the previous regime, even if explicit utopias were not formulated. They are deducible from the critiques. The most common trick employed certain keywords and symbols to raise issues that by analogy could incite certain reactions in the reader. Usually, they did not have to be explicated as they were based on the common knowledge of the author and his/her presupposed public, concerning the problems of democracy, freedom, of the minority question, and their presupposed connections. This relationship was never (and could never be) seriously developed or explicated in the public sphere, and caused several problems after 1989.

The greatest representative of this type of discourse was without doubt the philosopher, György Bretter. For some time, he was followed by a group of his students. But, by the second half of the 1980's, for some reason or other, high quality encoded texts became increasingly rare.

Three examples of pre-1989 ambivalent discourse will be presented in the following, taken from very different areas, expressed in very dissimilar situations, and with very diverse messages and implied publics. Since the development of a public creates the major problem in the case of utopias aiming at education, the analyses will put a particular stress on the question whether and how the public was conceived.

<sup>36</sup> This is shown by Koselleck in his description of the role of the free mason lodges (see p. 91).

<sup>37</sup> Koselleck, *idem*, 7.

### 1. *Kányádi, or the lack of a public*

The first example proves peculiar not because of the depth of the analysis, or the virtuosity of encoding, but because of its publication venue: *Napsugár*<sup>38</sup>, the “Children’s Review of the Young Pioneers’ National Council”. From 1987, the well-known poet Sándor Kányádi published his “children’s” poems and stories in *Napsugár*. One such poem, entitled *Don’t Be Afraid*<sup>39</sup>, says approximately the following:<sup>40</sup> winter (i. e. Ceaușescu’s rule) is coming to an end, the sun warms up, and there is hope on the tips of the branches. There is still ice, but it slowly cracks.

This still looks like a poem for children. But some appear quite odd in a journal for children under 10. *Autumn Encouragement*<sup>41</sup> can be read as lamenting a minority on the verge of extinction due to a harsh regime and emigration:<sup>42</sup>

We hear the last chimes of the bell on the mountain, there is no more reason for us to stay here. The forest is crying, all the animals run away, everything is frozen. But some animals and plants encourage us that we are not lost yet. In spring we will find our place here again.

This example sheds light on another crucial issue. Namely, that in the few years before 1989, many authors put an ever stronger stress on the “oppositional” gesture. The number of those who emigrated or turned silent increased. There was also a public feeling and/or idea that the Hungarian intelligentsia in Romania “betrayed the Hungarians”.<sup>43</sup> Those who decided to remain in Romania and go on writing had two choices: encrypt, or edit samizdats. As it has been argued, such choices were made in opposition to the gestures of the power, as it was increasingly difficult to write about the surrounding reality, while at the same time, the intelligentsia also resorted to gestures. This had an important impact on the latter’s relationship with the public. As Kányádi’s example shows, one could be ready to give up even the hope of having, creating one’s public. Ambivalent discourse in the form of en-

<sup>38</sup> “Sunray”

<sup>39</sup> Ne félj. *Napsugár*, Vol. XXXI, Nr. 2, 1987. 9.

<sup>40</sup> From the point of view of literary criticism such a plain rendering of a poem is probably unorthodox, but for the purpose of the present analysis it is enough, and *this is how these poems were read*. Literary virtues – if any – came second.

<sup>41</sup> Őszi biztató. *Napsugár*, Vol. XXXI, No. 11, 1987. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Emigration, primarily to Hungary, became a widespread option in the 1980’s, especially in intellectual circles.

<sup>43</sup> The idea was first spread by a few intellectual circles in Hungary. See Szilágyi N. Sándor: Levél egy kivándorolni készülő értelmiségijéhez. [A letter to an intellectual on his way to emigrate] In Cseke Péter (ed.): *Lehet – nem lehet? Kisebbségi létértelmezések (1937–1987)* [Is it possible? – is it not? Interpretations of the minority situation (1937–1987)] Mentor, 1995. 155–163.

rypted critical text in a journal intended for primary school pupils does not make much sense.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the activity of the first samizdat journal published in Romania.<sup>44</sup> Its first six issues hardly circulated. They were produced in five copies. The editors showed them to three or four people in Romania, but nobody knows how many readers this meant. More copies were made from issue seven. Yet, it gained its greatest audience through Radio Free Europe<sup>45</sup>, and found its place in private circles thereafter. Again, this shows that its publication was not more than a (important!) gesture toward themselves, the Democratic Opposition in Hungary, (which helped them, and was considered to be an important part of the public), and even the world. But for the local reading public, its creation does not seem to have been a serious issue or goal. Whatever the case, this approach offers an explanation of the ignorant and patronizing contemporary attitude toward “(civil) society” taken by the intelligentsia.

This samizdat was intended to be the heroic act of some young people, destined to show that “we” do not lag behind other, more brave people in Eastern Europe, that there are intellectual and moral efforts at demolishing the regime, that its endeavor to hermetically seal off Transylvanian Hungarians from all the world is not successful, and that intelligent, meaningful opposition is possible even here. Furthermore it aimed to show that solidarity, idealism, heroism, and trust persisted, and that “we” can still say something to the world. Personal experience qualifies this perception of how people understood the editors’ attempts. But the Securitate’s operations for finding these people were large-scale terrorizing practically the whole of Hungarian intelligentsia in Romania. In the population at large, their efforts resulted not in trust, solidarity, heroism, confidence, the sense of a meaningful existence in Romania, etc., but just the opposite: fear, hysterical secretiveness, lack of trust, a mania of seeing

<sup>44</sup> Of the two samizdat journals in Romania, the most successful, *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints), managed to have nine issues published between January 1981 and January 1983. It was edited by a group of young intellectuals, who, with one exception, all emigrated after being caught by the Securitate. The other journal, *Kiáltó Szó* (meaning approximately “loud word”) – had only two issues, and was edited by Sándor Balázs. It seems that in spite of some attempts, there were no Romanian samizdats.

<sup>45</sup> It seems *Ellenpontok* managed to raise a smaller dispute between the Hungarian and the Romanian department of Radio Free Europe. According to its internal regulations, each national section had to be concerned with its own country. One of the editors of *Ellenpontok* complained that due to this system nobody spoke of the Hungarian minority in Romania. As a result, the Hungarian samizdat, and generally the issue of the Hungarian minority was raised by both the Hungarian and the Romanian department.



collaborators of the Securitate in everybody, and a general feeling that one had to emigrate because life in this country was meaningless. Although *Ellenpontok* was seen as a sort of victory, the general mood among (especially young) intellectual circles reached the bottom of despair, instead of the heights of confidence. Actually, the editors themselves disbanded. And, although most of them now live abroad, there is quite a lasting tension and resentment among them even today.

## 2. *The party committee for supervising performances, or, power as a public*

On March 3, 1983, the County Commission for Supervising Theatrical and Musical Performances was established. Its twenty members included the propaganda secretary of the county, other party officials and propagandists, actors, journalists, teachers and workers. Its goal was to see, discuss and criticize all the performances presented in the county. This included even the approval and supervision of small bands playing at weddings, in discos, bars, etc. Directors, actors and musicians were forced to “consider” their critical remarks. Every opening night and first performance required its prior consent.

Ambivalent discourse can be seen in the way actors, directors, and/or authors responded to criticisms. And the very first “supervised” play proves and especially enlightening example.

The commission began its career with scandal. On the day of its establishment, the commission reviewed the final rehearsal of András Sütő’s play, *Pompás Gedeon*<sup>46</sup>. The criticisms of the committee referred on the one hand to religious elements found in the play. They advised interrupting fragments of religious music with jazz, to disrupt their continuity. The number of angels had to be drastically decreased, and the atheism of the youth had to be more militantly exposed. Scenes taking place in heaven should not have any educational potential, and thus the number of religious texts had to be limited (although the play uses them satirically).

The main criticism, however, referred to national topics. A line of a Hungarian nationalist song sung by the antagonist, Gedeon – “Where are you,

<sup>46</sup> It can be approximately translated as *Gedeon the Pompous*. The author at that time was already considered a living classic of Hungarian literature. The play, an early one written in the fifties, criticized “kulaks”. It was probably chosen because thirty years later, nobody took a play about collectivisation seriously and thus the message could not be distorted by the propagandistic atmosphere of the fifties. It made indirect criticism possible since, if taken literally, some parts of the text were naive and inoffensive. In the context of the 1980’s they could also be seen as hidden criticisms of the regime or of its rhetoric. Or, in certain cases, as will be seen later, acts of bravado.

Székelys” – had to be omitted. As the party secretary for propaganda said it might remind the public of the next verse, “I gave you in custody a homeland (i. e. Transylvania) to take care of”. References to “happy Austria” or Franz Josef also had to be eliminated. Both the director and the author of the play tried to explain that these elements shed a negative light on the negative characters, by criticizing their approach to collectivization and their nationalism. From his own point of view, however, the party secretary probably made a valid point. He did not say so, but it was obvious in the 1980’s that national values could maintain their expressive force even when expressed by negative characters, truly not seen as such anyway as few people found kulaks despicable. And they were by far not really negative, since hardly anybody thought that kulaks were despicable people

The public sought criticism, not the coherence of the play. They sought elements to interpret out of the context and the logic of the play according to their free will. Such possibilities had to be restricted as much as possible. If the propaganda secretary thought that the interpretation of the author might contain a trick, he eschewed it.

Over the seven years of the commission’s existence, however, the most important conflict erupted within the commission itself. Criticisms could be directed against anything, not just ideological problems; the scenery, the clothing (no red boots please, “this can be interpreted”), the actors’ performance, and the play itself. This often brought about hilarious results. In the case of classics like Shakespeare, or Gogol, “interpretable” parts of the text had to be cut. Permission to present *Antigone* by Sophocles was granted by saying that “the play is good, and it has already been presented many times”. When commenting on the performance of Gogol’s *Diary of a Madman*, one of the members of the commission stressed the clarity of the actor’s dislike of the Czarist regime. It would have been very unpleasant to mention the possibility that the actor saw the Czarist regime as an analogy to Ceaușescu’s. (Actually, in the end the commission was “wise” enough to prohibit the performance.)

At a certain point, some members of the commission tried to impose the idea that their duty was only an ideological supervision of the performance, abstaining from artistic criticisms, due to their lack of qualification, not an actor or director could be found among them. This would have meant on the one hand, in the case of classics, ideological criticism was irrelevant, and on the other hand that artistic activity was less restricted (allowing room for “tricks”). Hard-liners in the National Council for Socialist Culture and Edu-

cation reacted promptly and issued a document stipulating that the commission had the obligation to criticize and give advice from all possible points of view, including artistic ones. Continually, internal opponents argued that they had no right to appreciate the artistic achievement of the actors and/or the director. They lost the debate; they could not offer counter-arguments to the problem of “interpretability”. And so, elements that “could be interpreted” disappeared from performances. Whenever in doubt, they posed the questions “what would the spectators understand from the play?” “How would they interpret it?”

As time passed, the elements that “could be interpreted” grew in number and diversity. Colors (red), tones (dark or light), atmosphere (happy or sad), size, could become a problem. Slowly, a silent and fierce competition developed between the – voluntary or involuntary – critical allusions of the artists and the vigilance of the commission. Practically all of the elements of a performance could become “dubious”. And this is how aspirations for total control actually brought about limitless possibilities for roundabout critique.

### *3. Baász, or the real public*

From the end of the seventies, until around the middle of the eighties, Sepsiszentgyörgy<sup>47</sup> was considered to be an unpleasant town during official holidays. From 1978 when a couple of school children put anti-Communist and nationalist posters in the streets on May Day, or on the 23rd of August (Romania’s national holiday before 1989), one could find Hungarian nationalist posters or handbills in the streets. This offered a good occasion for the police (secret or not) to take to the streets in large numbers. The town kept quiet thinking that the Securitate distributed the handbills as provocation.

In 1981, on the 60th anniversary of the Romanian Communist Party, an exhibition of the county’s artists was organized. For this occasion, the graphic artist Imre Baász conceived a complex work consisting of two parts. One was an installation: six shirts stained with blood hanging on a rack, and on the floor around them, and on the wall, there were handbills of two types. One set consisted of copies and originals of old leaflets from the inter-war period, calling the public to fight against the government, for Communism, etc. The other set contained handbills announcing the opening of the exhibition. Baász had taken a special trip to the museum of the party’s history in Bucharest, where he carefully examined, handbills of illegal Communist activists in the inter-war period.<sup>48</sup> Al-

<sup>47</sup> A small town in South-Eastern Transylvania. In Romanian Sfântu Gheorghie.

<sup>48</sup> In Romania, the Communist Party was banned between 1924-1945.

though the graphic structure differed in the second set they retained a phrase from the inter-war handbills: “read and pass it further”.

The other part of the project was a performance.<sup>49</sup> After midnight, on the eve of the anniversary, Baász and three other friends went about town posting handbills advertising the exhibition opening.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, a frightened policeman who immediately requested a patrol, and reported to headquarters that he had found people hanging manifestos in the street caught them. The patrol, the chiefs of the county police, and the secret police appeared.<sup>51</sup> Baász and his friends were taken to the station and interrogated. To their complete bewilderment the police found that the posters had no particular subversive message, and gave them their official approval. The county’s party secretary was woken up around three a.m. and confirmed that the invitations had to be made public. Baász and his friends were released.

Baász immediately went home and called his wife (who was away), told the whole story, and confessed that he feared that his joke would not get away unpunished. He might even go to jail. No such thing happened. On the contrary, the next day the police called Baász to the station, where he was presented a formal apology.

In those days, Baász used to say, “it is not the existence of the work of art, but the method that became of primary importance”.<sup>52</sup> As previously mentioned, for him the two pieces – the installation and the performance – formed a unitary whole. The invitations functioned like the inter-war handbills: they were both part of the installation. The inter-war handbills were also stuck on the walls at night. The formal resemblance with the inter-war leaflets and the night actions lead to a mixing of periods of time, frames of reference, enemies, goals, values, etc., into a new unitary whole.<sup>53</sup> The six white shirts should symbolize moral cleanliness, stained with the blood of nameless victims. In those

<sup>49</sup> The whole performance was described to me by several people, among them Baász himself. There were no differences among the various versions.

<sup>50</sup> There are photos of this moment of the performance.

<sup>51</sup> One should not forget that it was on the eve of an extremely important anniversary, and especially in that period, the heads of these two institutions were directly responsible for what happened.

<sup>52</sup> Chikán Bálint: *Baász*. Szabad Tér Kiadó. 36. (no publication year mentioned)

<sup>53</sup> While this type of game with the form was original, recourse to a symbol of power in order to “fight” it was not unique. See for example the case of Shostakovich, who said that the “Leningrad” symphony was not referring to the town under siege during the war, but to the destruction of old Leningrad and its people by Stalin. See his memoirs: Shostakovich, Dmitry: Sosztakovics, Dmitrij (1997): *Testamentum. Dmitrij Sosztakovics emlékei Szolomon Volkov szerkesztésében* [Testament: The memoirs of Shostakovich] Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1997.

times, however, a white shirt took part in a different context: the suit (usually dark), and necktie. These were already symbols of the “integrated” person, namely the party officials and the secret police (somewhat like the leather coat in the fifties). The whole image also suggests officialdom stained with blood, in a context in which past and present struggle against one another, leading to the rise of martyrdom against injustice.

*Conclusions: ambivalent discourse and parrhesia*

In conclusion, one can say that abstract, coherent moral rules canonized in different – theological, philosophical, etc. – systems became transformed in everyday life into a soft, malleable set of norms, which may be used according to circumstances. The situations, the actions, and the actors may take on different meanings according to the context of the action or of the preceding or ensuing discussion. This allows one to avoid the self-critical moral introspection that would make certain actions problematic, in favor of an acceptable personality that can be represented in both private and public interactions.

Ambivalent discourse – most likely considered reprehensible by moralists – played, and continues to play an important role in two major spheres of everyday life. On the one hand, it creates and reproduces an acceptable and pragmatic image of oneself and the world. Ambivalent discourse has become constitutive of an acceptable, although “motley” personality, which becomes coherent not through abstract rationalizations, but in practical validity. On the other hand, it can seriously contribute to the management of everyday conflicts (including inter-ethnic conflict), as ambivalent discourse “liberates” us from the exigencies of sincerity, and of plain speech. In exchange, it offers a plurality of values, norms, and interpretations that can be chosen according to the context of action and the re-telling of that action as well. This is how a personality develops that, from the point of view of everyday life, is both morally, and pragmatically coherent, acceptable, and meaningful. Coherence is achieved not by separating the public and private sphere, but by constantly reconciling them.

Ambivalent discourse makes it extremely difficult for a public elite aspiring to the level of opinion leader to create abstract communities resting on common, coherent values absorbed by the public, especially when the correctness of long or short term social, political projects are at hand. One such project is nation building. Another such project, one prominent in Eastern Europe (but not only) is “transition”. In the case of the latter one faces a strange sit-

uation: in many respects, the goals, values, and norms of regime change, while legitimate for common people, are not valid in everyday life.<sup>54</sup>

The problem of ambivalent discourse is not specific to contemporary Eastern Europe. From a moral point of view, the situation is similar to the conflict between sincerity and strategic games presented by Norbert Elias.<sup>55</sup> He treats the antithesis between ‘superficiality’ and ‘depth’, ‘falsity’ and ‘honesty’, ‘outward politeness’ and ‘true virtue’, all connected to the German antithesis between Zivilization and Kultur, in the context of French versus German, of aristocratic, respectively middle class mentality, and national consciousness. In a discussion between Goethe and Eckermann analyzed by Elias, the latter, an adherent of middle-class values, argues in favor of a frank expression of personal values. Interaction is defined by personal likes and dislikes, and by the similarity of the interlocutors’ inner nature. Goethe, on the other hand, puts forward a typically aristocratic argument, based on reason, itself a result of a process of civilization, opposed to anything like “nature”. The tendency to take our nature as a guide is not sociable. Natural tendencies are opposed to education. One should not expect people to harmonize with them. Instead, one should converse with everyone, since ‘with opposed natures one must take a grip on oneself if one is to get on with them.’

Such conflicting values can arise in any situation where differences in social standing, culture, and mentality are part of interaction. Should one give way to ‘natural tendencies’, including frankness and honesty, thus selecting partners according to inner resemblance, like Eckermann? Or, should one behave in a ‘civilized’ manner, like Goethe, conversing with everyone without expecting others to have ideas or values similar to ours.

Even more generally, one could tackle the problem by raising a question like Michel Foucault’s, “what conditions raise the possibility of telling the truth?”<sup>56</sup> According to Foucault’s presentation, in Ancient Greece telling the truth was distinguished from a series of other types of discourses. First of all, it was in no way connected to (self) doubt, a topic that appeared much later. In-

<sup>54</sup> On the difference between legitimacy and validity, see Weber, Max: *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. (ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich), Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. Vols. 1–2, 1968. 31–32.

<sup>55</sup> Elias, Norbert: *The Civilizing Process*. Volume I: *The Development of Manners: Changes in the code of conduct and feeling in early modern times*. Oxford: Blackwell; New York: Urizen Books, 1978. 29–34.

<sup>56</sup> See Foucault, Michel: *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia* (six lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, Oct–Nov.1983), downloaded from <http://foucault.info/downloads/discourseandtruth.pdf> November 23, 2004.

stead, it was associated with certain moral qualities. Knowing and speaking the truth was an *ethical*, not an *epistemological* problem. Courage proved moral qualities and involved a risk taken consciously. Parrhesiastic courage was a duty, not the result of some external coercion. The aim was not to demonstrate the truth, but to be critical towards oneself and the external other.

Speaking the truth also involved certain social requirements. First, the parrhesiastic game required that both the truth-teller and the target of criticism were free citizens. People outside the realm of freedom could not take part in this moral game. The second condition involved courage, duty and risk; saying the truth implied a social position of inferiority. And last but not least, the parrhesiastic exercise brought about a valid result when the criticized person(s) entered the game, presented themselves as standing on the same moral platform, and accepted the criticisms wholeheartedly. Parrhesia was not a monologue (as in the case of rhetoric), but part of a dialogue.<sup>57</sup> In this respect, Athenian democracy made open criticism difficult, even impossible, and rendered it incapable of entering the parrhesiastic game.

What can be said about Eastern European parrhesia? As little research exists in this field, one may only hypothesize using the ancient Greek as a comparative guide:

a) in everyday speech, speaking the “truth” – as in the Greek case – is not reflexive, and shows hardly any (self) doubt. Thus, the problem is not adequacy with reality. And, consequently, Verdery’s problem seems to miss the point.

b) “telling the truth” is considered a moral act, but one can often be moral by *not* telling the truth, or only half of it. Consequently: 1. telling the truth is not always reflective of “courage”, and “courage” is not always linked to personal agency- the social context may make it impossible to be “courageous”; 2. telling the truth in Eastern Europe is not necessarily connected to criticism; 3. telling the truth is not connected to duty. The stress is not on courage, criticism, duty, or responsibility, but on “pragmatism”– on being a trickster who outwits the “partner”.

c) while in ancient Greece telling the truth was connected to social standing, in Eastern Europe it was (and is) more complicated. Even in a position of superi-

<sup>57</sup> The distinction between dialogue and monologue shows strong resemblances with Mikhail Bakhtin’s views. See Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *Beszédelméleti jegyzetek. In A beszéd és a valóság. Filozófiai és beszédelméleti írások* [Notes on the Theory of Speech, in Speech and Truth: Writings on Philosophy and the Theory of Speech. The Russian title: *Iz zapisej 1970–71 godov.*]. Budapest: Gondolat, 1986. 515–547; Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *Dosztoyevszkij poétikájának problémái* [The dialogue in Dostoyevsky’s work. The Russian title: *Problemi poetiki Dostoyevskogo*] Budapest: Gond-Cura – Osiris, 2001.

ority one can be (partly) critical, a truth-teller. Role distancing made it for one to distance themselves from the regime they were supposed to represent.

d) parrhesia is a question of dialogue. However, the rules of the game are much more complicated, involving an ambivalent character. On the one hand, dialogue can lead to avoiding open criticism and/or responsibility. On the other hand, it *may* also provide the means by which the partner is forced to enter the parrhesiatic game.