

The County of Sound

Ambiguity and conflict in the Czech Underground Culture

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The purpose of this intervention is to highlight the ambiguity and conflict in the Czech Cultural Underground movement, paying particular attention to the commemorative concerts, and moreover, the openings that the underground developed in front of the politicization of the movement as a result of oppressive dynamics of the secret services. A further object of consideration will be the collective process of transition, from a totalitarian regime to a post totalitarian one, which has underlined some interpretative nodes.

The ethnographic research, conducted in the current Czech Republic in 2011, has resulted in a long period of participant observation, characterized by a direct approach towards the context to be analysed and by the study of materials released from the secret services available at The Institute for Study of Totalitarian Regime. It presents organized Underground concerts, in honour of the anniversary of the death of key figures. These concerts, with their own repetitiveness, are very similar to the commemorative rituals, which create "New Myths" in society.

Whilst not wishing to demonstrate, a situation of ambiguity emerges with the conflict of "to remember"/"to hide" meaning that to recall some realities and not others, alludes to the fact that the conflictual reality memories from the past are tarnished.

The occasion sparked by the study of the Czech Cultural Underground, has not only been used to comprehend the historic roots of the phenomenon, but it has also created an investigative tool for the deep dynamics of Czech society. What characterizes the so-called "Czech Underground" is specifically the lifestyle, the various initiatives, reports of resistance in lifestyles and cultural production. Traditionally, the dimension of the "anti-culture" was born as a form of protest against the classic categories and prudish society. This kind of art is considered by the totalitarian system as a voice of resistance and as such, it is pushed to the extreme and is strongly contested. On the basis of the request to respect human rights and with the occasion of the process which was carried out against members of the musical bands (1976) comes the most important initiative of the Czechoslovak dissent called Charter 77. The greatest exponent is Václav Havel, who later became the president of the Czech Republic.

The following efforts of power structures to push out of the Czechoslovakia uncomfortable people and control of the situation carried out by the secret services were significant. Many of the people were registered as secret service agents, some of them only because they were defenceless against the power. The contacts established between the members of the underground, dissidents and the secret service are illegible. The files detailing some key characters, written by the secret services, were the first ones to be destroyed. The shadow which hides the affair relating to the documentation, and in particular the members of the Underground is truly thick.

From the research it becomes apparent, with a certain clarity that the almost existential ambiguity of the Underground, in order to survive, had to collaborate with the regime. Nonetheless, some Underground exponents still managed to exercise real power, only after the fall of the totalitarian regime, whilst still remaining an Underground spokesman. The significance of the "anti-

culture” is challenged and loses its meaning, when we believe that the anti-culture excludes the power’s forces.

The weight of a society, which hasn’t recognised the victims of the totalitarian regime, has created an air of distrust. The internal difficult relations inside the community, have produced an atmosphere of mutual criticism. However, the *liminal* characteristics of the Underground, have given origin to the new system, with an alternative potential to what it was born as. The recent form, which comes from the union of the Underground with the normalising sphere of the dissent, leaves a particular mark inside the Czech society. The possibility persists, that despite all the changes, which have marked the passage of society, there is a substantial continuity of deep dynamics, including the infiltration module.