

Mueller, Klaus

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EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES, NEO-TOTALITARIANISM
AND SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY

KLAUS MUELLER

Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung gGmbH (WZB)
Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin

Abstract

The relevance of sociological theory for explaining the recent dramatic changes in Eastern Europe is at hand. The impact of the downfall of communism has been compared with those "Great Transformations" along which sociology evolved as a "science of crisis par excellence" (Habermas). The actual elaboration of a sociological theory of post-communist transformation and its relation to East European studies is, nevertheless, anything but clear. The unexpected collapse of socialism was perceived as a failure of prognosis and led to self-critical debates in all social science disciplines. In this rethinking its basic concepts, sociology is exposed to pressure from different sides - above all from the polemic launched with the surprising revival of the theory of totalitarianism against the „liberalist social sciences" across the board. Influential historians like Robert Pipes, Martin Malia, Robert Conquest, and Francois Furet followed by sociologists from Robert Nisbet to Seymour Lipset hold the fatal influence exerted by social science concepts on Eastern European and Soviet Studies during the last decades responsible for the "whole intellectual disaster in Western Academe" which became apparent after 1989. These approaches, as the neo-totalitarian accusation runs, elevated Soviet socialism to a modernization strategy and conceded a reform capacity which, in fact, was not available. Target of this critique are all attempts of a social history "from below", sociological theories of action and especially "the positivist illusion of modernization theory". Blinded by political motives, it is said, the insights of (neo-)totalitarianism theory into the inevitable collapse of communism were dismissed.

In order to correctly draw the lines in the controversies between neo-totalitarianism theory and the "social science approach", it is helpful to follow them along the changing career of the concept of totalitarianism thereby reconstructing the sociological arguments involved in the current discussion on the disintegration of socialist societies. On this line it will be argued (section 2), that the crisis of the classic theory of totalitarianism and the "social science approach" in Soviet studies did not follow from a politically motivated "revisionism" since the 1960s and 1970s. Analysing the socialist societies after 1945 was shaped from the very beginning by sociological, political science and economic models, which contrasted with fundamental assumptions of the classic concept of totalitarianism (section 3). The findings generated by this type of research as well as its limits are revealed when it comes to explaining the disintegration of Soviet socialism. The neo-totalitarianist's objection is correct

that ranging socialism in an evolutionary scheme of ascending forms of society was problematic. This construction seems highly inadequate in view of the post-communist crises and regressions (section 4). On the other hand, a coherent and self-reliant neo-totalitarianism theory is not visible (section 5). Instead the research on Eastern Europe after 1989 has seen an explosive growth of the "social science approach" in the course of which many "revisionist" theorems have been refuted, modified or confirmed.

Nevertheless, the wave of social science theories entering the post-communist studies does not imply a way back to the golden age of classic modernization theory. The lesson to be learned from (neo-)totalitarianism theory concerns the stress it lays on domination and its specific irrationalities, variables which were indeed neglected by mainstream sociology and, after the Soviet breakdown, are ignored by the liberalist optimism of neoclassic reform programmes. The drama of the post-communist crises reminds us that there are no hidden hands and no evolutionary universals which would lead, quasi automatically, to "modernity". On the other hand, the lesson to be learned from the "social science approach" is that even the "most total totalitarianism" did not result from a "logic" of history, but from certain constellations of interests, reciprocities between rulers and ruled, institutions of administration and value commitments, etc. which are quite accessible to a reconstruction in sociological terms.

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1. From the Downfall of Socialism to the Crisis of Social Science Theory

The importance of sociological theory for explaining the recent dramatic changes in Eastern Europe is obvious. The breakdown of Soviet Socialism marks the most drastic turning-point in the history of post-war Europe - the dismissal of a form of society which for a long time was considered a competing alternative to democratic capitalism even by non-Marxist Western social scientists.¹ The impact of the downfall of communism has been compared with those "Great Transformations" along which sociology evolved as a "science of crisis par excellence"²: On the agenda are the constitution of democratic institutions, the development of market-regulated economies, and new forms of social integration.

If certain dilemmas are raised by simultaneous democratization, economic liberalization, and social restructuring, then these dilemmas have accompanied sociology since its existence. In contrast to political science and positive economics which swiftly developed into specialized disciplines, sociological theory has always kept societies as wholes in its view. As long as the Eastern European crises are centered on the transition to a new principle of social organization, a theory seems required which according to Talcott Parsons "treats the most comprehensive unit ordinarily studied by sociologists, the *total society*."³ In other words, the radical change in Eastern Europe belongs to those extraordinary events from which far-reaching implications can be expected for society, as well as for social science theory.

The actual elaboration of a sociological theory of post-communist transformation and its relation to East European studies is, nevertheless, anything but clear. The unexpected collapse of socialism was perceived as a failure of prognosis, as the "Black Friday" of social science.⁴ The following (self-) criticism of the defaults of social science has, no doubt, manifested indisputable weaknesses. It holds true that political analyses of the socialist regimes presupposed the stability of their research object and have underestimated the fragility of communist rule over Eastern Europe. Western economic science systematically exaggerated the capacity of planned economies well into the 1980s. Many sociological theorems were tailored for the crises phenomena and integration problems of Western societies: they did not see that socialism was exposed to much graver "problems

¹ An unambiguously competing form of modernization" as Almond 1968, 332, wrote.

² Habermas 1981, 19-20.

³ Parsons 1966, 1.

⁴ v. Beyme 1994, 35. Cf. Malia 1990, 297: "Certainly Western Sovietology, so assiduously fostered over the past four decades, has done nothing to prepare us for the surprises of the past four years."

of legitimization" than "late capitalism".⁵ Therefore, social science and research on Eastern Europe are under a phase of reconstruction with good reason.⁶

In this process of rethinking its basic concepts, sociology is exposed to pressure from different sides - above all from the polemic launched with the surprising revival of the theory of totalitarianism against the liberalist social sciences across the board.⁷ This polemic is based on the twofold thesis that neither the communist seizure of power in 1917 nor Gorbachev's reform attempts since the mid-1980s are to be understood as "social revolutions"⁸, but as a *coup d'etat* by a small elite who forced a system upon Russian society which was, in the end, incapable of further development. The issue at stake concerns four controversial questions which the research on Eastern Europe allegedly has failed to clarify: The retrospective assessment of Soviet socialism as a form of domination, the dynamics of the socialist system, the reasons for the Soviet collapse, and the prospects for the post-communist societies. Influential historians like Robert Pipes, Martin Malia, Robert Conquest, and Francois Furet held the fatal influence exerted by social science concepts on Eastern European and Soviet Studies during the last decades, responsible for the "whole intellectual disaster in Western Academe" which became apparent after 1989.⁹ These approaches, as the neo-totalitarian accusation runs, elevated Soviet socialism to a modernization strategy and conceded a reform capacity which, in fact, was not available.¹⁰ This kind of critique was directed against all attempts of social history "from below", sociological theories of action and especially "the positivist illusion of modernization theory".¹¹ The USSR was

⁵ As Tiryakian 1995, 250, notes.

⁶ Rutland 1993, 122; cf. Armstrong, 1993; Bergson 1995; Breslauer 1992; Burawoy 1992; De Spiegeleire 1995; Meyer 1991 and 1994; Motyl 1990 and 1992; Orlovsky (ed.) 1995; Remington 1992; Schroeder 1995; Tucker 1992; Walker 1993.

⁷ Malia 1993, 86; Pipes 1993, 75. A similarly encompassing consolidation of "practically all the humanities" is suggested by Conquest 1993, 91-98, here 97.

⁸ The target of this criticism was the concept of "social revolution" as defined by Skocpol 1994, 5, "as rapid, basic transformation of a society's state and class structures, accompanied and in part accomplished through popular revolts from below", and applied in a comparative analysis of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions (Skocpol 1976). Cf. for an application of this concept to the Russian revolutions Mann 1993, 660-666. "Social revolutions" are interpreted by Mann as reaction to dilemmas resulting from the incorporation into international processes of modernization - a dimension which, for obvious reasons, is missing in the concept of "closed societies".

⁹ Conquest 1993, 97.

¹⁰ Even the CIA relied on the methodology developed by Abram Bergson for its estimates: "The CIA was simply applying the best scientific techniques and concepts of measurement developed by academic sovietology, which on the whole had a tendency towards the left" (Malia 1992, 60).

¹¹ Malia 1995, 126; cf. Pipes 1993, 68-69. The neo-totalitarian attack aims especially at the methods of the *Annales* School and the socio-historical interpretations of 1917 as proposed e.g. by Suny 1983 and mentioned above. With Furet, a prominent social historian of the *Annales* Group, has changed sides to neo-totalitarianism theory. For a reply to Pipes by a social historian see Suny 1994. I will return to a discussion of the considerable differences between classic totalitarianism theory and its neo-totalitarian revival in section 5.

thoughtlessly considered "a society like every other".¹² The insights of (neo-) totalitarianism theory into its inevitable collapse were dismissed.

The renaissance of totalitarianism theory is no eccentricity of neo-conservative historians. Conservative sociologists like Robert Nisbet stress the enduring relevance of Hannah Arendt.¹³ Liberal theorists like György Bence and Seymour Lipset consider the contributions made by social science to Soviet studies "a well-informed error", against which they contrast the heuristics of the totalitarianism model: "Although much maligned by Sovietologists in the 1970s and 1980s, it has proven to be the most fruitful of the paradigms."¹⁴ Ironically, the concept of totalitarianism, opportunistically dropped by Western theorists in the wake of detente, gained an unexpected topicality in the self-definition of the post-communist societies and in the vocabulary of reform politicians - as a recognition of a lacking civil society.¹⁵ After the samizdat publication of Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* had already unfolded its effects on Eastern Europe, and the translation of Conquest's *The Great Terror* was circulated as the first treatise on Stalin's system of terror in Russian in 1972, the more recent works of Pipes and Malia became public events in Moscow's political life. Now even the Russian leadership recognizes the historical period between 1917 and 1987 as one of "totalitarianism"¹⁶ - after, as Malia claims, his famous article published under the pseudonym "Z" in 1990 was distributed among the members of the Central Committee and sharpened their consciousness of crisis.¹⁷

Whatever impression the anti-sociological undertones of the recent controversies over an adequate perspective on the breakdown of Soviet socialism may make - they represent a challenge both to sociological theory and to (post-)communist studies. In order to correctly draw the lines in the controversies between neo-totalitarianism theory and the "social science approach", it is helpful to follow them along the changing career of the concept of totalitarianism. My aim is not so

¹² Furet 1995, 617.

¹³ Nisbet 1992; for Nisbet's concept of totalitarianism, embedded in a conservative philosophy of history, see his 1983, 182-206.

¹⁴ Bence & Lipset 1994, 181; though an excellent survey, Bence and Lipset, concerned almost exclusively with the failure to foresee the Soviet breakdown, deliberately omit the social historians' research on the long term dynamics of social change. Cf. for another critical survey Laqueur 1994, 96-130.

¹⁵ On the spreading and use of totalitarianism theory in Eastern Europe after 1968 see Rupnik 1984, 43-71.

"Russia in the 20th century lived through different periods - monarchism, totalitarianism, perestroika, democratic development. Each development possessed an ideology of its own. But now we have none. And that is bad" (Boris Jelzin, July, 7th, 1996, cited after Die Zeit, No. 33, August 8th 1996). Cf. Laquer 1994, 94: „almost everyone in Russia - even conservatives and old communists such as Yegor Ligachev - used the term, sometimes perhaps to sweepingly. Those who did not, really meant 'totalitarianism', when for some reasons they used another term."

¹⁷ Malia 1994, ch. 12, fn. 14.

much a retrospective exercise in critique of ideology¹⁸ as a reconstruction of the sociological arguments involved in the current discussion on the disintegration of socialist societies.

In this sense, I would first like to show that the crisis of the classic theory of totalitarianism (section 2) and the "social science approach" in Soviet studies did not emerge due to a politically motivated "revisionism" since the 1960s and 1970s. Analysing the socialist societies after 1945 was shaped from the very beginning by sociological, political science and economic models, which contrasted with fundamental assumptions of the classic concept of totalitarianism (section 3). The findings generated by this type of research as well as its limits are revealed when it comes to explaining the disintegration of Soviet socialism. The neo-totalitarianist's objection is correct that ranging socialism in an evolutionary scheme of ascending forms of society was problematic.¹⁹ This construction seems highly inadequate in view of the post-communist crises and regressions (section 4). On the other hand, a coherent and self-reliant neo-totalitarianism theory is not visible (section 5).

2. Limits of the Classical Theory of Totalitarianism

To sociologists, "totalitarianism" seemed for some time to be rather a topic in the history of the social sciences than a topical challenge to their own theory-building. Not quite without reason, because the subject and the concept opened a highly politicized terrain. The origins of the term reached back into the liberal, democratic and socialist criticism of Italian fascism, which adopted the term to characterize its own radicalism before the scope of the term was expanded in the 1930s to cover both National Socialism and Stalinism.²⁰ Thus the classic theory of totalitarianism conceptualized an epoch trying to see the anti-liberal and anti-democratic trend of the European dictatorships of the 20th century under the common denominator of a "totalitarian temptation" (Jean-Francois Revel). After the defeat of Italian fascism and German National Socialism, its domain was reduced to Stalinism, which at the end of World War II was upgraded to a world power.

¹⁸ Cf. Chandler 1994, 8.

¹⁹ Parsons 1971, ch. 7; Habermas 1981, II, 563-567, here 564, interprets "bureaucratic socialism" as a complementary, "post-liberal" development path to "organized capitalism", which "attains a similar autonomy towards the economic system due to mostly nationalized means of production and institutionalized one-party rule". Cf. Habermas 1973, 31, where the state-socialist societies, "considering their politically elitarian access to means of production", are classified as "post-capitalist". See a critique of this view by Arnason 1991, 181-213.

²⁰ On the genealogy of the concept in the writings of Luigi Sturzo, Luigi Salvatorelli, Giovanni Amendola, Lelio Basso and others see Peterson 1978.

At the height of its career in the 1950s, the concept of totalitarianism was adopted in the typology of state forms in order to classify a type of rule not subsumable under older forms of autocracy. Despite later differences totalitarianism theory and modernization research agreed on one point: in contrast to dictatorship, tyranny, and despotism, Soviet socialism was considered a specific modern form of government, unthinkable without advanced techniques of indoctrination, psychological manipulation and mass communication, unique in its combination of force, terror and mobilization. While autocracies and authoritarian regimes may allow a limited pluralism of social, economical, and political institutions, modern totalitarianism strives for a radical change of the social order and the creation of a new man.

The well-known classic version of totalitarianism theory in form of a historico-philosophical portrayal was presented by Hannah Arendt in 1951. Its generalization to an analytical ideal type was carried out by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1956.²¹

Arendt's work was convincing, as it shed light on the techniques of an extremely centralized apparatus, which blocked any accountable delegation of power and subjected the competing parts of the apparatus to periodic purges. Totalitarian politics replaced political, national, and social traditions with a one-party dictatorship, opposed by atomised masses unable to act on their own, but ready to be mobilized at any time. Arendt's theory, which was to be applied to both Communism and Nazism, was hence not only theoretically relevant as a theory of domination, but of considerable sociological relevance as it assumed a tendency of totalitarianism to dissolve society and to remodel human nature. The concept of totalitarianism was intended to characterize a para-militaristically organized society, in which all civil activities, all intermediary institutions, even religious communities, relations between relatives and friends were replaced by organisations of the state. Considered as main variables, the policy and ideology were installed "from above", with the top-rank of the party and the secret police as decisive actors.

This explains the (neo-)totalitarian aversion against interpretations of the Russian Revolution as a social movement "from below", i.e. a movement which was usurped by the Bolshevik leadership only *after* the revolution and during War Communism - when the Bolsheviks were trying to maintain power - by transforming the Soviets into state institutions and eliminating competing left wing parties as well as the internal opposition. In Pipes' and Malia's view, the "Russian Revolution" did not articulate the socio-economic contradictions of the late czarist industrialization but exploited the chaos caused by World War I. Therefore, it could not claim historical legitimacy. On the contrary, by seizing power the

²¹ Arendt 1951; Friedrich & Brzezinski 1956. Useful comments on the hesitant reception of totalitarianism theory brought by European emigrants into the USA are presented by Nisbet 1992.

Bolsheviks forced their Utopian project of a social and ideological transformation on Russian society regardless of any losses. After the violent dissolution of classes and nationalities and in the face of the elimination of all mediating powers, analyses of social structures, hypotheses of social change or interpretations of political aims hardly seemed to make sense any more. „The Communist Party (...) came to substitute both for the proletariat and for the logic of history; and this substitution furnished the basic institution of the Soviet system - the Party-state. But this entity was no ordinary or 'normal' state, an institution which even in its most authoritarian or despotic form remains in significant measure distinct from society. This was a total state that substituted for society."²² Considering the uniqueness of totalitarian movements, the conventional categories of social science seemed to have lost their applicability.

Despite these difficulties, Friedrich and Brzezinski proposed a definition of totalitarian rule which seemed more appropriate by scientific standards than Arendt's historico-philosophical explanation - a proposal, which at the same time was entangled in the notorious problem of seizing historical constellations with analytical definitions.

According to the authors, totalitarian dictatorships were characterized by six features which were supposed to express their "basic similarity". By combining these six features into a kind of "totalitarian syndrome", the authors created an ideal-typical concept, thus comprising the following elements: (1) an official ideology directing which is to direct society to a final state of mankind, thereby legitimizing all violence and sacrifices as a realization of a higher form of democracy; (2) a hierarchically organized, dictatorially led party to which the state bureaucracy (and every institution) is subordinated; (3) a politically instructed police terror, directed against arbitrarily defined opponents, encompasses the entire population, as well as the party; (4) the state monopoly on information, news, and (5) weapons means a concentration of all of the means of domination in the hand of the party and the state so that finally (6) the economy becomes subordinated to bureaucratic co-ordination and central control.

This ideal-type definition was very suitable for generalization, and subsequently, historical empires, pre-industrial as well as communist mobilizational regimes were classified as "totalitarian".²³ The Soviet Union, however, still remained the primary field of application. The theory of totalitarianism, in its different versions, advanced to the dominant Sovietological paradigm in the 1950s. Moreover, it gained a polarizing function in the context of anti-communism. The appreciation of the term mainly to be found with political scientists and historians, pointed beyond descriptive and analytical purposes: "totalitarianism" functioned as a

²² Malial 1993.

²³ Moore 1958.

normative premise to start every exploration into totalitarian systems with an option for Western values of freedom.²⁴

The main problem was not that a scientific theory was dependent on the political vicissitudes of the East-West-confrontation - its supporters were recruited from the right as well as from the left. More problematic was the fact that its availability for rather opposing purposes indicated that its denotation was vague and its explanatory value doubtful. Arendt had already differentiated the merely "authoritarian" Italian fascism from Stalinism and Nazism (while Friedrich, for example, considered all three regimes totalitarian). A point of debate remained whether subsuming Nazism and Soviet communism under one and the same category - even admitting all similarities in the techniques of domination - concealed significant differences in ideological aims, economic systems and readiness to engage in a war of conquest.²⁵ Even when the concept after 1945 was applied primarily to the Soviet Union, it remained unclear, whether only the period of Stalin's rule or the complete history since 1917 should be characterized as "totalitarian".²⁶

The stagnation of the approach could be seen from the ad hoc-adjustments, by which its framework of definitions was adapted to the changing realities of the post-Stalin era. The decrease in repression and the fact that ideology became increasingly routinized led to paradoxical conceptions such as "enlightened", "rationalized", "constitutional", or "welfare"-totalitarianism.²⁷ The methodological problem of this kind of concept formation was most evident in Friedrich's later writings in which the real types of Nazism and Stalinism which once stood in the

²⁴ As Motyl 1990, 83, writes: "the totalitarian 'model' provided solid moral ground on which to stand: all dictatorships were alike - be they Hitler's or Stalin's - and all deserved moral condemnation." Hannah Arendt (in her preface to the 1966 edition of her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 478 fn.) did indeed notice the political functionalization of the theory of totalitarianism: "the cold war era has left us an official 'counter-ideology' (...), anti-communism, which at the same time has the tendency of developing a claim to world domination and tempts us to follow an imagination; because it principally forbids us to distinguish the different communist one-party-dictatorships which exist in reality from a genuine totalitarian system".

²⁵ Cf. for diverging views within the totalitarian approach Aron 1965, ch. XV vs. Pipes 1994, ch. 5, who advocates that Communism, Fascism and Nazism were essentially identical (and therefore argues against Arendt's emphasis on anti-semitism as a constitutive feature of "totalitarianism"). Instead, not only the revolutionary gesture but also the Nazis' anti-semitism is, in a highly dubious way, made understandable by the impression which the Bolsheviks' seizure of power made on Hitler: "Bolshevik outrages, and the open incitement to world revolution by a regime in which Jews were highly visible" (ibid. 256).

²⁶ Some authors argue that even Stalinism during the Great Purges should not be considered "totalitarian" but reconstructed along socio-historical lines; see Getty 1991; Fitzpatrick 1986 and the contributions to Getty (ed.) 1993. For an action-theoretical approach to the most brutal project of Nazism, "eliminative antisemitism", see Goldhagen 1995, who consequently argues against totalitarianism theory.

²⁷ Fainsod 1968, 108; O'Brian 1977/78, 70-80.

centre of the approach, were suddenly reinterpreted as "rather extreme aberrations" from the ideal type of totalitarian dictatorship, hardly ever realized.²⁸

And this was, at the same time, the crucial theoretical shortcoming: the classification of the East European societies in accordance with a typology of forms of domination and the definition of its "essential characteristics" did not constitute a theory of their socio-economic and political dynamics. Progress in exploring the "closed societies" was essentially made through qualifications by Western social science theories and a growing (self-) criticism of the adherents of the totalitarianism approach. The decisive factor for the diffusion of social science models into communist studies since the early 1950s were not the changed political conditions per se but undeniable explanatory weaknesses of the classic theory of totalitarianism. The assumed omnipotence of totalitarian rule let the political decisions appear as a direct result of centralist decisions, without paying attention to their implementation by competing apparatuses and without laying stress on the interaction between politics and society - a view which was increasingly implausible in the face of "de-Stalinization" and the newly accessible information on communist systems. Under these circumstances, the critical evaluation of classic totalitarianism theory did not reflect a politically motivated "revisionism", but a growth of empirical, theoretical and methodological knowledge.

3. Soviet Studies and Social Science Theory

The increasing use of social science theories in East European studies was, far from what recent polemics suggest, not the result of the late 1960s when the "radicals moved up to the teaching posts."²⁹ Sociological sophistication of East European studies was already asserted in 1953 at the first interdisciplinary conference dealing with the topic "totalitarianism", at which, along with the original proponents of the approach and along with Sovietologists like Merle Fainsod, social scientists like Harold D. Lasswell, David Riesman and Karl W. Deutsch took part.³⁰ In fact, theories on Soviet-type societies after 1945 were based upon close co-operation between Soviet studies and sociology right from the beginning. Clyde Kluckhohn, the first director of the Harvard Russian

²⁸ Friedrich 1968, 34. Linz' (1975) much more elaborated three-dimensional classification, according to which totalitarian and authoritarian regimes differ in their respective *degrees* of political pluralism (monism vs. limited pluralism), of ideological penetration (centrality of ideology vs. authoritative mentality) and mobilization (mobilization vs. depoliticization). Nevertheless, similar difficulties arise: "totalitarianism" is not based on its "unique" quality but merely as an extremely pronounced "authoritarianism". The same gradualistic softening of the original concept characterizes Sartori's (1993) vindication of totalitarianism theory.

²⁹ Furet 1995, 616; cf. Conquest 1993, 97-98.

³⁰ Cf. Friedrich (ed.) 1954.

Research Center, welcomed Alex Inkeles' opening of the series published at his institute: "It is particularly appropriate that the first volume of the Russian Research Center Studies should be by a sociologist."³¹ At the same time, Inkeles' *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* opened the way to an analysis of Soviet society, which replaced the political rhetoric of the totalitarianism approach by the standards of empirical-analytical social science - a development which I would like to survey in three steps.

(a) The distance which sociology and economic theory kept towards the concept of totalitarianism was due to methodological rather than political reasons. Since the 1950s already, the social sciences were orientated more closely to the postulate of a value-free science. The normativism of traditional political theories appeared to be suspicious. This also applied to the newly established Soviet studies: „The field of Soviet Studies is such that failure explicitly to condemn is viewed by some as tantamount to approval, and failure to praise is taken by others to be equivalent to criticism. Such misunderstanding may be avoided, or at least minimized, if the reader will keep in mind the distinction between a political and moral evaluation and a scientific judgement."³² Accordingly, the appropriate concepts and methods were not designed for the "uniqueness" of the phenomenon under study, but were constructed in the context of generalized theories.³³ On the other hand, Soviet studies became relevant beyond their immediate domain, by being intended to verify general social theories in the Soviet case. The topics raised - e.g. mass communication - were no longer subsumed to a logic of domination, but became part of a programme to explore the concrete relationships between communicative, social, and political systems and the tensions implicated therein. The classic sociological theme of the role of ideas in social change was turned into the empirical question of how effective the dominant ideology may be in the real course of Soviet politics.³⁴

The functional approach which became prominent in the following years, suggested to analyse "totalitarian systems", on the one hand with regard to their immanent conditions of stability and legitimization, on the other hand from the

³¹ Kluckhohn in Inkeles 1951, p. xii.

³² Inkeles 1951, xii.

³³ For Inkeles these were the theories on mass communication, social structure and social psychology developed during World War II by Lazarsfeld, Merton and Parsons. On social mobility see the important study of Inkeles 1950. Inkeles & Bauer 1959 presented an investigation into Soviet everyday-life, which pointed perfectly towards a social history from below which is so energetically incriminated by Malia and his colleagues. The reproach of "social scientification" refers to the growing impact which the "Behavioural Revolution" had on the communist studies during the 1960s, recognizable e.g. in the contributions to Fleron (ed.) 1969 or Kanet 1971.

³⁴ E.g. the programme of the important monography by Moore in 1950, which appeared as vol. 2 of the *Russian Research Center Studies* edited at Harvard University. Cf. the instructive preface of Kluckhohn on the methodological design of the *Soviet studies* and its relation to social theory: "(...) not bounded by arbitrary disciplinary lines (...) more than an approximation to a generalized social science."

comparative perspective on functionally equivalent solutions for general problems of development in backward societies.

The economic theory of growth in the 1950s and 1960s was more interested in the amazing rates of growth and investment of planned economies than in their "totalitarian" structures of administration. Impressed by increasing GNPs, political science eventually replaced its descriptive typologies of rule in favour of a functionalist perspective of the Soviet regime, which now appeared as one of several "mobilizing systems": "Successful models now include Japan and the Soviet Union."³⁵ Approaches of this kind were not primarily interested in historical singularities, but rather in varieties of modernization and corresponding types of stress and crises.³⁶ The neutrally sounding formulas of "social change" and "modernization" were aimed at phenomena which contradicted the theoretical assumptions of totalitarianism: the potential of the communist regimes to change. The keywords of "convergence" and "evolution" assumed the existence of general development imperatives on advancing "industrial societies".³⁷

The hypothesis of convergence suggested the application of modern social science theories to the origins, dynamics, and lines of conflict inside the Eastern European societies. In this sense, few sociologists have doubted that Soviet-type regimes were modernizing societies. The so-called "socialist primitive accumulation", as is well-known, was an attempt - and not the first one in Russian history - to catch up with Western European industrialization for which especially the Prussian "industrialization from above" served as a model.³⁸ During the course of the enforced Soviet industrialization, numerous indicators commonly applied to modernization processes were fulfilled: de-traditionalization by force; relatively high rates of growth and investment; urbanization and mobility never fully controlled; a high degree of alphabetization, and elements of welfare-state integration. To speak in the words of Walt Rostow's *Non Communist Manifesto* of 1960: „In its broad shape and timing, then there is nothing about the Russian sequence of preconditions, take-off, and drive to technological maturity that does not fall within the general pattern; although like all other national stories it has unique features."³⁹

³⁵ Apter 1965, vii; cf. 392: "Each of these systems handles modernization differently, even though, in practice, their activities may appear similar." For Apter's arguments against totalitarianism theory see *ibid.*, 244-45, fn. 21.

³⁶ Even if this would mean that Nazism and Soviet communism were not "essentially different" from the Western pattern of modernization but distortions, exaggerations and uneven developments of the pattern itself (Parsons 1942). In Parsons' analyses of the fascist movements in Germany and Japan the concept of totalitarianism, therefore, played no role.

³⁷ See esp. Sorokin 1960 and Tinbergen 1961, 333-341.

³⁸ It should be remembered that Stalin's "revolution from above" was not an "Asian programme", but did emulate Prussia's attempt to catch up with England's lead in industrialization without risking the democratization of the French Revolution. On the Prussian model of a "revolution from above" as opposed to the French Revolution see Bendix 1978, 407 pp. and 422; on Stalin's adaption of this conception see Moore 1950, 231.

³⁹ Rostow 1960, 67.

Indeed, Rostow's *Dynamics of Soviet Society* (1953) may be regarded as the first analysis of the Soviet Union in terms of modernization theory - a study which differentiated consistently between the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of the Soviet system. This was an analytical perspective which corresponded to Parsons' contemporary formulation in *The Social System* (1951). Rostow attributed the peculiarities of the Russian traditions of rule to Lenin's voluntarist revision of Marx's theory into a strategy of seizing power, which at the same time was legitimized in objectivist terms by its alleged insight into the necessary course of history.⁴⁰ The intention to transform society by unconditional use of force was, however, refracted on the factual modalities of the exertion of power: on diverging interests between and within the bureaucratic apparatuses of the army, the party, the secret police, and the administration, on the relevant groups of society alienated by the use of excessive force, on the contradiction between political arbitrariness and technocratic efficiency.

Considering the precarious balance of integrative and disintegrative tendencies, Rostow was less interested in the perfection than in the limits of totalitarian rule in a "moving society", in which political, social, economic, and cultural factors played together in a way which evaded even the most vigorous political measures. The institutional structure and political process of the Soviet Union seemed to be less the result of conscious long-term planning than of uncontrollable consequences of a policy confronted with internal restrictions posed by society, situative conditions, self-produced problems and necessary adaptations to the international constellation.⁴¹ Therefore, Rostow derived the postulate for an interdisciplinary approach to explain the motivation of the Russian leadership, the potential of resistance within Russian society as well as alternative paths of future development - not without (as regards e.g. the self-interest of the bureaucracy) contributing to the knowledge of Western societies as well.

(b) Rostow's programme was implemented by that branch of East European studies oriented to the modernization paradigm, which since the early 1960s had replaced the idea of a strictly totalitarian system by more sophisticated analyses. These were the first to recognize the far-reaching impact of the reforms initiated by Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s. The results of this research are not only of historical interest. They demonstrated a very productive exchange between sociologists such as Reinhard Bendix, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Alex Inkeles, Gerhard Lenski, Barrington Moore, and the advanced communist studies. Furthermore, the results of these studies could have been an ideal preparation for the unexpected course of the post-communist reforms - a point to which I will return later.

⁴⁰ Rostow 1953, 84-97.

⁴¹ An assessment which is impressively vindicated by the now accessible Politburo protocols 1919-1940; see David-Fox & Hoffmann 1996, 99-103.

In spite of the variety of approaches⁴², the modernization approach to communist studies followed a common perspective, which differed clearly from the classic model of totalitarianism.

Despite all the deformations, Soviet socialism appeared as a *strategy of modernization*, i.e. a form of-rule, which did not merely amount to its own totalization, but pursued, however corrupted, goals of development.⁴³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington, Inkeles and Moore interpreted numerous phenomena as consequences of rapid industrialization, which - largely independently of the ideological declarations of its originators - forced a drastic change upon Russian society: „Important as the commitment to socialism was, by itself it was not the most important element. Among many Bolsheviks there was a commitment to the means of getting there: speedy industrial growth under centralized control. (...) It was the speed that carried with it the commitment to coercion.”⁴⁴ This could at least raise the hope that tendencies towards democratization would sooner or later follow successful industrialization.⁴⁵

The *functional analysis*, in contrast to a mere description of existing institutions, could detect a considerable change of political processes within the institutional conservatism of Soviet society. It validated the relationship between the political programme, the dynamics of social change and economic imperatives, as pointed out by Rostow. Richard Löwenthal observed the secularization of Utopian goals into a programme of development. The relation between the political system and social development had reversed itself within a persisting authoritarian framework: The political leadership which had forced development upon a backward society was confronted by the rising pressure of social differentiation and demands for participation.⁴⁶

Under the impression of such changes, even Brzezinski dissociated himself from the classic conception of totalitarianism; he reduced its validity to the high-time of Stalinism. While the ideologically-guided transformation of society in the 1930s - which received considerable support from the younger generations and the urban

⁴² Surveys of the theoretical perspectives which became increasingly pluralized since the late 1950s, are given by Bell 1958; Laqueur 1983, 13-21, and esp. Almond & Roselle 1989.

⁴³ On this question Fainsod's grand material study (Fainsod 1953) already dissented from Arendt's historico-philosophical outline; cf. Arendt 1966, 486, fn. 23.

⁴⁴ Moore 1987, 50. Accordingly, not only the emancipatory ambitions of Marxism, but also the socialist value of equality were sacrificed to the primacy of industrialization- see *ibid.*, 53; cf. on this line Suny 1993, 157-58.

⁴⁵ In reference to this literature, Parsons formulated his well-known prognosis that the Eastern pattern of modernization would develop towards a multi-party system (Parsons 1971, 127; cf. below, fn. 69).

⁴⁶ Löwenthal 1970, 112; cf. Fainsod 1968, 110: "(...) some redefinition of influence within society appeared inevitable". By referring to these social differentiations and to a simultaneously growing self-awareness of the citizens, many authors later explained the politics of perestroika See e.g. Ruble 1987 and 1990; Lapidus 1989, Skilling 1990 and Starr 1989.

proletariat - had altogether been suitable for industrial modernization, it now turned out to be no longer 'necessary' for running a "relatively developed industrial society", but on the whole "dysfunctional". Brzezinski did not interpret the conservative backlash against Khrushchev's reforms as a renewed totalitarian mobilization, but as "rather defensive measures against the self-assertion of society". The relationship between state and society would hence increasingly reflect the "traditional autocratic model and not the modern model of totalitarianism".⁴⁷

The *comparative perspective* on the communist systems led to the application of categories developed in view of Western societies to the analysis of important details in Soviet-type systems. The theory of interest groups outlined by Gordon Skilling and others stressed the influence of weakly organized groups, factions and informal networks on the formulation and implementation of political themes.⁴⁸ It examined the competition within and between the party organizations, ministries, regions, etc., which by no means met the official dogma of the monolithic unity -due to parallel responsibilities, changing coalitions and diverging interests. Even within the strongly centralized hierarchy of the formal system, the political leadership remained dependent on reports, the implementation of their decisions by lower authorities, and regional and local co-ordination.

Referring to these insights to be expected from the general theory of bureaucracy, Jerry Hough specified Brzezinski's thesis of the "dysfunctionality" of totalitarianism by adding an important micro-sociological argument.⁴⁹ The effective exercising of power essentially depended on the position of that group, which actually controlled the means of production: in the "local organs", which represented the medium levels of the party in the districts, cities, and regions. The "Soviet prefects", who in the beginning were the executors of political repression and ideological indoctrination, were increasingly made responsible for the local translation and co-ordination of central directives. On the other side, the local levels of the party had to rely on co-operation by professional groups, specialists, and managers who in this way gained influence on policies. Increased attention for the *functional elites* of the Soviet system, from whom an interest in reforms and political liberalization could first be expected, seemed justified for comparative reasons alone. "In most areas of life the best way to predict the attitudes, values, and orientations of men in the Soviet Union is to draw from the general knowledge that we have about men holding comparable positions in Western

⁴⁷ Brzezinski 1971, 266; cf. Brzezinski 1969, 20 and 25: "Today, (...) Soviet society is far more developed and stable, far less *malleable* and atomized."

⁴⁸ Skilling 1966. It should be mentioned that the idea of a "limited pluralism" gained a critical function during the Czechoslovakian experiment; see Rupnik 1984.

⁴⁹ Hough 1969 presented a theoretical and empirical analysis which Brzezinski (1971, fn. 31) - in sharp contrast to the downgrading of Hough and the "Houghites" by Conquest - did know to appreciate as "a very good argumentation".

industrial societies."⁵⁰ Analyses of the generational change, of the social and professional composition of political bodies became a prominent field of empirical research and should later play a role in interpreting the start of perestroika.

Nevertheless, the "institutional pluralism" of Soviet society and the "responsive capacity" of policy remained overshadowed by the peculiarities of the system of domination. They were not based, as assumed in the classic model of pluralism, on free access to autonomous associations, but enabled organized groups to influence the political process through the channels of a system of institutions created by the state.⁵¹ Additionally, they were a fertile ground for culturally shaped patron-client-networks, as described, among others, by T. H. Rigby, Zygmunt Bauman, and Lucian Pye. On the one side they reflected an informal system of status-differences and career paths; on the other side they produced functional substitutes for a judiciary system and for markets.⁵² Privilege-seeking, the exchange of compliance and loyalty as well as highly personalized relations between functionaries and the public were to be understood from the background of a superimposition of charismatic, traditional, and modern attitudes; this demonstrated the effectiveness of pre-revolutionary traditions.⁵³

The perseverance and functionalizing of the pre-revolutionary *political culture*, the competition between official culture and subcultural counter-currents, the after-effects of czarism or the dictatorships between the wars were examined in the research on political culture by Stephen White, George Schöpflin, and Gabriel Almond. Comparative political science pointed to essential differences of the structure and means of rule, the setting of goals, and the state of development inside the socialist world. Regarding the legitimization of socialist regimes, the appeal to particularistic bonds and the well-dosed employment of national traditions interacted with Western "values of modernization" (Löwenthal). George Breslauer saw the "welfare-state authoritarianism" legitimized by an implicit "social contract": the promise of social justice, equality and rising consumption was exchanged against conformity with the system.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Inkeles 1968, 427.

⁵¹ Hough 1977, 22-24, and Hough & Fainsod 1979, Ch. 10: The Institutional Actors. Cf. Brown 1983, 61-107. Brzezinski 1966 spoke of an "elite pluralism" representing different group interests, which, channeled by bureaucratic bargaining, gained influence on the setting of the political agenda. On the thereby qualified role of the party see Lane 1985, 230-32. From a sociological point of view Shils had already characterized the compensatory role of this 'pluralism': "Incapacity on the one side, evasiveness, creativity and the necessity of improvisation on the other, introduce into totalitarian regimes, which would deny its validity, a good deal of pluralism (Shils 1956, 154). Even the often demonized "military-industrial complex" was divided into a multitude of bureaucracies, competing with each other and with the factions of the military for technological and strategic priorities (Almquist 1990).

⁵² On clientelism see Eisenstadt & Roninger 1981, Jowitt's (1983) concept of neotraditional corruption, an adaption of Weber's sociology of domination to the Soviet Union. Cf., also on a Weberian line, Rigby's 1983 analysis of political legitimation in "mono-organisational socialism".

⁵³ Hahn 1991.

⁵⁴ Breslauer 1978.

(c) These results were not only in contradiction with the theory of totalitarianism, but also with the ideology of the communist leadership. The ideal of a centrally controlled society and economy contrasted to the actual functioning of a system, which left- and required - wide leeway for decentral mechanisms. From a sociological point of view, it was to be expected that the formal constitution and the informal organisation of an overcentralized society would diverge. The most stringent examination of the competition and interaction between the formal and informal spheres in Soviet-type systems was, however, presented by Ed Hewett, an economist.⁵⁵ The "dead-weight" of vested interests of regions, ministries, enterprises, and functionaries was always conspicuous - which had been illustrated by the death of numerous reform attempts in the bureaucracies. The design, implementation and renegotiating of the five year plans usually lasted two years.⁵⁶ In a way, the bargaining mechanisms used were not a simple defect. They were functional at least as far as the information, motivation, and incentives, which were required for the central scheduling of plans or the implementation of central directives, could be gained only at the local level.

The size of informal zones in Soviet society could be imagined from the estimated 25% share of the shadow economy from the Soviet net material product. Quantitative estimates, however, did not capture the total extent and variety of informal activities. The typology of the "coloured markets" which was introduced by Katsenelinboigen and elaborated by Gordon Smith described the differences between legal, half-legal, and illegal financial sources and sales methods of goods in the Soviet Union very well.⁵⁷ That broad networks of pushers ("tolkachi") were tolerated, which in co-operation with local party functionaries had to compensate for the lack in horizontal integration between enterprises and branches, showed that the actual functioning of the Soviet economy was as far removed from the official self-representation as from Western reconstructions of the plan model.

Even if some of the informal activities mentioned above may have performed a compensatorial function - they added up to a fatal outcome. Soviet-type societies were as intransparent for the supposedly well-informed leadership as for the official sciences. This precisely led to the specific problem, so aptly described by Tatyana Zaslavskaya, to which the reform-oriented social sciences in the Soviet Union and the Soviet studies in the West were confronted in a similar manner. "The formal economic mechanism is a skeleton, which is not a live organism. It is wrapped in live, concrete social relations, about which we know almost nothing nor have the evidence to identify them in our literature."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Hewett 1988, esp. 96-100.; cf. on the political system Lane 1985, 197-203.

⁵⁶ Smith 1988, 195. For a background analysis see esp. Lewin 1973.

⁵⁷ Smith 1988, 216.

⁵⁸ Zaslavskaya 1987, 326.

What kind of literature might have been more capable of anticipating the dynamics of the reform attempts initiated in the 1980s and the subsequent disintegration of Soviet society? In the reform-oriented sociology associated with Zaslavskaya's "Novosibirsk School" which had direct influence on the early programme of perestroika, the insight into the futility of reform projects "from above" had prevailed for some time: "The structure of the national economy long ago crossed the threshold of complexity when it was still possible to regulate it effectively from a single center."⁵⁹ The results of her empirical research on the Soviet social structure, on the internal differentiation of the working class and intelligence, on regional and demographic problems, on conflicts inside the nomenclatura classes, etc., contrasted considerably with the official dogma of an increasingly unified society. Considering this research which was quite obviously inspired by modernization theory, and considering a more and more intense exchange with Western sovietologists on the perspectives of perestroika, an interesting convergence between Western and Eastern social science seemed at hand.

4. Competing Explanations of the Soviet Breakdown

If my survey is correct, the diffusion of social science theory into East European studies did not result from a politically motivated break with the theory of totalitarianism, but from the trend to interdisciplinarity since the 1950s. The approaches mentioned above differentiated the total field of research into new units and variables by pointing out the informal structures of communist policy, and the diffusion of power behind the "totalitarian facade" (which Merle Fainsod had observed in the first edition of his classic *How Russia is Ruled*⁶⁰).

After the experience of the collapse of communist systems in 1989-91, the behavioural revolution in the Soviet studies of the 1960s and 1970s appears, nevertheless, in a light which may explain the revival of totalitarianism theory. Were the final reform attempts during the 1980s propelled by a universal "modernization imperative" towards a market economy and political democracy so that the Soviet Union could at last prove to be a "normal society" under adjustment pressures?⁶¹ Or did the "misconceptions of Western Sovietology" and "the West's cult of Gorbachev" conceal the - evident - non-reformability of the "most total totalitarianism"?⁶²

⁵⁹ Zaslavskaya 1983, 91.

⁶⁰ Fainsod 1953, 328.

⁶¹ In this sense, see Fukuyama 1993.

⁶² Malia 1992, 58-61.

In answering these questions, I will compare (a) the modernization approach and (b) the neo-totalitarian's explanatory sketch to clarify, in the following section, the decisive points of difference.

(a) A (self-)critical retrospective view on Soviet studies cannot ignore the renewed objections to the transfer of Western categories. What matters, however, is learning the right lessons from the benefit of hindsight.

Regarding the application of Western models of bureaucracy, domination, and democracy to East European realities, the losses in descriptive strength and explanatory power were well-known. Much of the deliberately provocative hypotheses remained speculative due to a lack of reliable data. The decision between competing approaches was often left to intuition. The vagueness in applying the concepts of *group* and *pluralism* to communist systems indicated the general problems of this procedure of "concept stretching".⁶³ Skilling was aware that the "groups" in Soviet politics did not possess the same solidity as their Western counterparts, but had to operate as loose networks of individuals due to lacking freedom of association and a simultaneous obligation to party discipline.⁶⁴ "Institutional pluralism" was in fact an ideal type which, as Hough was only too aware, would provoke opposition and rejection.⁶⁵

The comparative analysis of Soviet institutions was rejected because of the normative connotation of terms like "participation" and "influence" in a Western context. The hope of learning something about one's own society by analysing the Soviet Union, as expressed since Rostow, was understood as a scandalous equalization of incompatible systems. This reproach referred first of all to Hough's characterization of the Soviet system as a special kind of parliamentarianism in which the leadership was responsible towards the quasi-parliamentarian Central Committee and the Politburo (which functioned as a quasi-cabinet).⁶⁶ These controversies, seldom led without political undertones, indicated how closely methodological questions within research on communism were implicitly or explicitly connected with valuations.

The main objection, however, aimed at a theoretical problem which indeed could not be denied. Political science, economic, and sociological analyses of the Soviet system were less closely integrated than could be expected from Rostow's earlier interdisciplinary draft. Often enough they led to diverging results. The supposedly consolidated power of the political system during the immobile Brezhnev era

⁶³ Sartori 1970; LaPalombara 1975; Kerblay 1983, 264; Walker 1993, 234-238.

⁶⁴ For a self-critical retrospective see Skilling 1983 and Hough 1983.

⁶⁵ "No scientist believes that it accurately summarizes the situation in the Soviet Union today", as Hough 1977, 24, admitted. For a lucid assessment of the normative problems of Soviet studies see *ibid.*, pp. 222-224.

⁶⁶ Hough & Fainsod 1979, 544.

contrasted with surprising social dynamics towards an urbanized society, towards higher degrees in education and rising expectations of participation. The economic output calculated from re-aggregated Soviet data again seemed to contradict the scenario of political disintegration: "Surprisingly, in the light of current retrospectives on the 'era of stagnation', the Soviet economy moved steadily forward throughout the 1960s and on into the 1970s."⁶⁷

In other words, it was not obvious what these contradictory findings implied about the dynamics of the system as a whole - a predicament which produced equally contradictory speculations about the future of Soviet socialism. Hough expected to be able to make a decision between these scenarios on the basis of a general theory of social change: "As the need for developmental categories and theories became clear, the scholars whose work seemed most relevant and proved most influential were the great sociologists, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons."⁶⁸

This recourse to sociological modernization theory, however, was accompanied by a functionalist interpretation of Soviet development against which the recent attack on "social science revisionism" is directed. In his evolution-theoretical synthesis of the available research, Talcott Parsons conceded that the "Soviet regime despite its prevailing dictatorial character has also introduced features of the democratic revolution" - although without genuine possibilities to elect between competing groups, without a legitimately organized opposition and without well-defined civil rights vis-a-vis the state.⁶⁹ Accordingly, irreversible processes of social change put the political system under stress. Imbalances between a relatively successful industrial and social modernization and a lack of legitimized party leadership appeared to indicate that the „welfare-state-authoritarianism" would have to progress towards political democracy. The internal renunciation of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and the foreign-policy formula of "peaceful coexistence" were interpreted as a pragmatic adaptation of an Utopian ideology to the imperatives of modern industrial societies, and as the capability of the political institutions to develop along lines which Hough extrapolated as follows: "If one sees evolution in the system in the last ten to fifteen years, one is more likely to see the possibility of evolution in the future."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Daniels 1993, 61. Or as the latest *World Development Report* of the World Bank, hardly suspicious of sympathizing with socialist economies, admits: "The achievements of the planned system were considerable. They included increased output, industrialization, the provision of basic education, health care, housing, and jobs to entire populations (...). Incomes were relatively equally distributed, and an extensive, if inefficient welfare state ensured everyone access to basic goods and services" (World Bank 1996, 1).

⁶⁸ Hough 1977, 224, or Hough & Fainsod 1979, 566.

Parsons 1971, ch. 7, here 158, mainly relying on the research by Berliner, Bauer, Fainsod, Grossmann, Inkeles, Moore and Rostow.

⁷⁰ Hough 1977, ix.

Perestroika seemed to realize this evolutionary potential while it tried to convert the pent-up democratization pressure into institutional reforms and political mobilization "from below". Gorbachev was considered a "transformational leader" having recognized in full clarity "that a complicated urban society at some point stops responding to the urges of backward political institutions."⁷¹ This was taken into account by renewing the functionary body and reorganizing the Politburo, by recognizing basic human rights, and finally by institutional innovations and surrendering the CPSU's monopoly of power.⁷² Social groups who could expect a good starting point for themselves in the reformed system were identified as a political basis for the democratic opening: young professionals, specialized workers who had risen to the middle class, highly-qualified women and national elites looking forward to more autonomy.⁷³ Gorbachev's genuine reform intentions were most clearly shown by the suggested federalization of the Union Treaty and the surrender of the Brezhnev Doctrine. "Never before in history had a great power retreated so precipitously from its sphere of dominion without having been crushed in a war."⁷⁴ Nothing, it appeared, could stop the East European countries' return to cultural and national diversity.

With the largely non-violent resignation of the communist party, that had been once considered all powerful, and the non-occurrence of a military intervention (which had been predicted so often), long-lasting controversies in communist studies seemed to be definitively decided in favour of the modernization approach. From this perspective, the failure to foresee the Soviet breakdown could be attributed to persistent stereotypes of totalitarianism theory, which had trickled down into journalism. From this point of view, the 1989 revolutions have shown "how undifferentiated the theories of totalitarianism had once described a monolithic system to us (...). Totalitarian leaders and theorists of totalitarianism had one thing in common: They believed in the effectiveness of the security apparatus."⁷⁵

(b) Nevertheless, it is this point, that the strongest argument against the modernization approach emerges - with an objection which explains the new interest in totalitarianism theory. The failure of the last Soviet reform attempts, the dwindling of the Communist Party and the course of the post-communist transformations have disappointed the evolutionary optimism from Parsons to Hough in several ways. Gorbachev's policy, instead of leading to the proclaimed *perestroika* "from below", initiated an unintended collapse. Disillusioned hopes for socialist reforms precipitated the "death of the third way".⁷⁶ The nationalist

⁷¹ Lewin 1988, 130. Cf. also Lane 1992, 3-5 and 382-86.

⁷² Cf. Breslauer 1989, and Brown 1990, esp. 151-53, and now Brown 1996, ch. 6.

⁷³ Cf. Ruble 1987.

⁷⁴ Daniels 1993, 120.

⁷⁵ v. Beyme 1994, 32.

⁷⁶ Lipset 1990.

touch of post-communist policy and the glorification of an imaginary past reveals how thin the layers of a civil society in Eastern Europe conjured by dissidents and Western observers actually were - some observers even speak of a case of "civilizational incompetence".⁷⁷

The economic collapse and the political apathy in post-communism prove how much Western research, however careful with its prognoses, had over-estimated the rationality of Soviet-type societies - contrary to all the warnings formulated by one of the most well-known Soviet dissidents, Andrej Amalrik, against illusions about the limits of reform.⁷⁸ The failure of perestroika is now understood as a validation of Amalrik's sarcastic prediction that the Communist leadership may be ready to import Western fashion - willing to accept a "socialism with uncovered knees" - but not a socialism with a human face. The unreformability of East European societies, proved post factum, is being traced back to the sustained validity of central variables of totalitarianism theory.⁷⁹

The arguments for reconsidering totalitarianism theory are, nevertheless, of differing quality. While historians like Furet and Malia blame the "logic of Leninism" for the disastrous outcome of East European history and blame the "social science approach"⁸⁰ for the reform illusions of Sovietology, political scientists like William Odom advocate a more differentiated critique of specific hypotheses in communist studies. These authors have in common that they hypothesize a basic structure of Soviet ideology and politics which was left untouched by de-Stalinization and against which, therefore, perestroika had to fail. According to the neo-totalitarian critique, Gorbachev's initiatives, unknowingly, violated the principles of the system. This was not so much due to its erratic character - which could be explained on the one hand from learning processes, on the other hand from tactical manoeuvres to neutralize or even include conservative forces into a strategy of transition to democracy.⁸¹ Their failure was much more systemic.

Firstly, it was due to the incompatibility of party rule and democracy. Attempts to bring dynamics into the party by massive renewals of personnel on all levels and to broaden the basis of reform policy by co-optation of critics, intellectuals and social scientists into a "socialist pluralism" of a "socialist system of checks and balances", failed due to the inertia of the apparatus. All measures of decentralization were not sufficient to counterbalance the enduring power

⁷⁷ Sztompka 1993.

⁷⁸ Amalrik 1969, 33-34.

⁷⁹ See esp. Odom 1992, esp. 81-88; cf. the authors mentioned below in fn. 114.

"With a fair admixture of Marxism (...); indeed, this Sovietology to a degree reflected Soviet thinking in the Moscow social science institutes of the Academy of Sciences" (Malia 1990, 299).

⁸¹ Cf. Breslauer 1989, esp. 171-177. For the following see Brown 1989.

monopoly of a party, which determined the occupation of leading functions in all political and societal institutions. Obviously the nature of this closely-tied network, instead of leading to democratic opening, would make every approach to liberalization lead to its dissolution.⁸² Gorbachev himself must have eventually recognized this and tried to outflank the Central Committee's Secretariat and the Politburo by upgrading the local Soviets and the Supreme Soviet to quasi-parliamentary organs, as well as creating a presidential office.

Secondly, the rigidity of the economic system did not seem to allow for the combination of plan and market introduced gradually by increasing entrepreneurial autonomy and licensing private co-operatives without simultaneously introducing free prices and private ownership. Under these circumstances, the reforms contributed to the dismantling of the vertical line of command and supply from the planning authorities to the enterprises without establishing new horizontal ties. Instead of modernizing the economy, this led to the final crisis of the system - as certified by the CIA: "The country went from stagnation to decline."⁸³ The informal economy, which seemed most likely to be able to activate entrepreneurial initiative, was parasitically embedded in the defective planning system. Its legalization did not create free enterprise, but a booty capitalism in which privatization in favour of the old nomenclatura played a major role.

Thirdly, the federalization offered to the republics did not stimulate the expected local reforms within a multi-national democratic state. Instead, this was seen as an invitation to political movements striving for national independence, into which the Communist Parties of numerous republics quickly transformed themselves, thinking not so much of democracy but of maintaining their power at any price. On the one hand, the "ethnification" of the disputes with the central government, the retention of revenues and the decline of inter-republican economic relations to barter, have condemned to failure the last attempt to stabilize the soviet state's economic foundation. On the other hand, the unity of the "Soviet people" has proved to be a myth. The collapse of the Soviet Union was considered an unavoidable price of its democratization.⁸⁴

Neither the dismissal of Marxism-Leninism accompanying Gorbachev's "new thinking" nor the pluralization of science and the opening of mass media could secure a social basis for the politics of reform beyond the perestroika intelligence.⁸⁵ The critical historical examination of Stalinism, fainthearted in the beginning, eventually destroyed the credibility of the entire Soviet system as the

⁸² Malia 1992, 60.

CIA 1991, 328; or as Goldman 1991, 142, generously concedes: "Gorbachev achieved one thing: the gradual dismantling of the planned and administrative economic system."

⁸⁴ Suny, 1990, 363.

⁸⁵ Cf. Connor 1996, pp. 6-9.

disclosure of the extent of terror increased. Even though perestroika was introduced as a return to the principles of Leninism, the causes of Stalinism were no longer seen only as "deformations", but traced back to the unscrupulous relation of Bolshevism to power. Characteristically, the blank spots of history were not primarily discussed by professional historians who were still inside the academic hierarchy.⁸⁶ The commitment from writers, journalists, and readers' letters indicated a high degree of public politicization - and, at the same time, the polarization within Soviet society. A defence line was drawn against Western-oriented intellectuals by a front of orthodox communists and Slavophile writers, who saw the achievements of the "history of the fatherland" brought into discredit by information on pollution, criminality, drug use, and corruption, all of which became accessible in the course of glasnost.

The economic downfall, the territorial disintegration of the Union, as well as the loss of intellectual orientation, manifests a depressing outcome of the last attempts at reform. "Six years of perestroika produced fairly rapid 'political decay' in the party but failed to achieve effective 'political development' of new political institutions."⁸⁷ If this outcome can neither be explained by insufficient willingness for reforms nor by tactical clumsiness of the leadership⁸⁸, then this appears to validate the structural insights of totalitarianism theory. Due to the over-integration of ideology, politics, and economy, every partial reform which was to have any effect at all necessarily had to affect the entire system and simultaneously provoke opposition on a broad front. Unlike Khrushchev, Gorbachev met considerable resistance from the grass roots, so that perestroika, against all its intentions, remained a policy "from above".

Up until the breakdown of the Soviet Union it became clear to which extent the Communist Party and its ideology remained the omnipotent decision-making actor above the society it ruled. The parties that entered the first elections were only short-lived fission-products, election clubs of former functionaries, or tactical alliances. The initial stages of civil society were limited to intellectual circles. Without a real basis in social movements, they could not build up an independent power against the perseverance of the old elite. The limited mobilization of the people, on the one side, has been ascribed to the culturally deep-rooted egalitarianism mainly of the state-dependent workers⁸⁹ who in the case of doubt prefer uniformity in poverty to freedom under risk, and represent the basis of the reformed and still influential communist parties. On the other hand, quite a few

⁸⁶ Cf. Lewin 1995, 300-303.

⁸⁷ Odom 1992, 84.

⁸⁸ According to Breslauer 1989, *Ill-Ill*, Gorbachev followed all the maxims of the *Transition to Democracy* literature; cf. Hough 1990, Remington 1990 and Bova 1991. On the other hand, one might argue that Gorbachev took Huntington's recommendation (1965, 414) too seriously, according to which a strong party may be of general interest because it alone can guarantee a stable frame for transformation.

⁸⁹ Zaslavsky 1995.

opposition groups, having lost their common enemy, were drowned in the waves of national movements. According to Malia, only one thing remained: "economic and social rubble - hardly the foundation to build a 'normal' society".⁹⁰

Can the theory of neo-totalitarianism thus rightly claim deeper insight into the non-reformability of socialist societies as well as into the painful course of the post-communist crises?

5. Defects of Neo-Totalitarianism Theory

The strength of the renewed theory of totalitarianism no doubt lies in its polemics against the evolutionist synthesis of Soviet studies: to expect a convergence of the Eastern to the Western model of industrial modernization proved to be just as wrong as the hopes for a non-capitalist way to modernity. Quite plausibly, the end of Sovietology was explained by its fatal relation to the evolutionary optimism of orthodox modernization theory that had already been negated by the crises of Western societies.⁹¹ Malia's gloomy anticipation of the difficult reconstruction of "post-totalitarian" societies was thus simultaneously a challenge to those sociologists who believed that the collapse of the Soviet system was no more than "catching-up modernization".⁹²

In contrast to functional theories which claim a positive correlation between industrialization and democratization, the incontestable merit of neo-totalitarianism theory consists of emphasizing the independent weight and the specific irrationality of domination. Power restructuring processes were and are constituting elements of Russian and Soviet history.⁹³ The main intention of neo-totalitarianists aims at proving the continuity of a form of domination across drastic processes of social change - even if certain characteristics of the classical definition of totalitarianism have to be given up. Their normative appeal is supported by the internal perspective of Eastern European dissidents who had an immediate experience of the limits of system-immanent reform attempts.

⁹⁰ Malia 1990, 334; cf. Malia 1992, 69.

⁹¹ "Just when sociologists thought they had buried modernization theory, Sovietology resurrects its crudest form - development through stages held back by cultural lag", as Burawoy 1992, 782, writes.

⁹² On this diagnosis see Mueller 1991 and 1992.

⁹³ Lupher 1996 shows from the point of view of Weber's sociology of domination, the comparative and historical approaches of Theda Skocpol and Mangabiera Unger, as well as Michael Mann's theory of power. He simultaneously corrects the thoughtless transfer of Western categories and the stylizations of the theory of totalitarianism.

But is the "update" of the concept of totalitarianism⁹⁴ offered by the critics of the social science approach also a theoretical alternative? This question, which articulates the common interest of sociological theory and post-communist studies, can be discussed on the basis of two criteria which lead beyond the fruitless polemics between "social science approach" and "historical logic": along the methodological status of historical prognoses and the comparative question which William Odom appropriately asks: "At issue is what each emphasizes, uncovers, and encourages us to anticipate about systems dynamics."⁹⁵

(a) Concerning the retrospective attempts to explain the implosion of the socialist system, the pure reproach of failed prognosis misses the *methodological problems* of analysis in social science. The neo-totalitarianist approach reduces the explanandum to an incident of collapse which was inscribed in the fatal logic of an essentially unreformable and intrinsically unchangeable socialism. Seventyfour years of Soviet history are stylized into a self-fulfilling teleology. Obviously, this "retrospective determinism"⁹⁶ cannot comply with the methodology of explanation in social science and historiography. The question is not to present isolated events; the point of interest is their explanation in terms of the socio-economic dynamics and the political constellations from which they emerged.

Every single factor of breakdown, when examined on its own, had been known for some time: the economy's innovation weakness; the costs of the domestic and external empire and military over-expansion; the undermining of the centralized system by an underground economy and networks of patronage; the loss of position in a globalized, hi-tech world economy; the erosion of ideological faith even within the leadership, along with corruption, etc. The question left unanswered was the interplay of these factors of crisis that had been visible at least since the 1970s. In particular, it was uncertain whether the political leadership, among whom the understanding of the dramatic situation began to prevail in the 1980s, would come to terms on a reform of the entire system.

In other words, the complex causality of the Soviet downfall consisted of a "cluster" of necessary conditions of crisis, which were insufficient when taken on their own. The dynamics resulting from their interaction, previous wrong decisions, changing political coalitions and from the unintended effects of Gorbachev's liberalizations were inherently accident-prone: "a protracted, complex, and unpredictable process."⁹⁷ The Soviet development neither followed

⁹⁴ Malia 1990, 301.

⁹⁵ Odom 1992, 67.

⁹³ As Di Palma, Giuseppe 1990 critically characterized this position. Bendix 1964, 13, spoke of a "fallacy of retrospective determinism".

⁹⁴ Colton 1987, 169; cf. the methodically careful retrospective sketches by Dallin 1992, Suny 1993, 159-160, and Deudney & Ikenberry 1991. "The chance that something 'unexpected' will take place is fairly significant", Hough already wrote earlier (in Hough & Fainsod 1979, 570), expecting that a new leadership would be combined with far-reaching liberalization - whereas a

an evolutionary logic of successful reforms nor the fatal teleology of a necessary breakdown. The fact that these dynamics could hardly be forecast was much more due to a structure of domination which was indeed familiar to Soviet research. Due to the hierarchical decision-making structure, radical impulses for reform could only be initiated by the supreme leadership.⁹⁸ Beneath the party unity" which until the very end was ritually conjured by the conservative members of the Politburo, anarchy, as Rostow had already elaborated, was lurking¹⁰⁰: Lacking explicit rules and constitutionally defined decision-making procedures, each serious dissent at the superior level had to give rise to incalculable power struggles - which characterize post-Soviet politics beyond the end of the Soviet Union to the present day.

If no definite prognosis was to be expected considering the complexity of Soviet tendencies of crises and the fragility of reform politics, then the methodological task of a retrospective analysis at least consists in constructing a historical understanding of the situation, within which structural constraints and decision-making situations, scopes for action and strategies, as well as wrong decisions and unintended effects should play a considerable role. The charge of failed prognosis addressed to Soviet studies is shifted to the substantial question of what the neo-totalitarianist historians might contribute towards such an understanding of the situation over and above the modernization approaches.

(b) Related to this question, neo-totalitarianism theory is by no means homogeneous. On the contrary, wherever it seems necessary, its authors fall back upon the results of the modernization approach and cover these results with value judgements instead of building a dynamic theory of their own.

In his reflections on immobilism and the possible decay of the Soviet Union written in 1966 and still quoted today, *Robert Conquest* classified the population and its differentiated interests into sociological categories. He discovered that peasants were alienated from the system, that workers articulated their dissent by striking, and the academic intelligentsia dodged the ordained orthodoxy. Conquest's diagnosis rested entirely on assumptions of modernization theory: The more complex economy and a differentiated society give rise to demands which overload the capacity of the political institutions. Quite contrary to the assumptions of classic totalitarianism theory, the assumed final crisis of the Soviet system was derived from the weakness of the political institutions, from the fact that it no longer tolerated a leader who could enforce the necessary radical reforms

democratization of the Soviet Union, as Hough extrapolated, would question the persistence of the Warsaw Pact, the Comecon and the Union's existing form.

⁹⁸ Kerblay 1883, 258 and 265.

⁹⁹ Steele 1994, 83-100, impressively describes the helplessness of the last conjurations of unity at the 19th party conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in June 1988.

¹⁰⁰ Rostow 1953, 197. Cf. Dahrendorf, 1958.

with Stalin-like power against the bureaucracy's inertia. Conquest's assumption of a possibly sudden or even catastrophic change left room for a scenario of evolution of the political system which was in no way inferior to Parsons' or Houghs' extrapolations and thus expecting "the gradual acceptance by the leadership - however reluctantly given - of genuine elections within the party and/or the gradual transformation of the perfectly adequate constitutional *form* of the Soviet state into reality."¹⁰¹

The sharp contrast between Conquest and his fellow historians to the "positivist" Sovietology consists of the postulate to shift the analytical focus from the mechanisms of political institutions, the structure of social practices and processes of social change to terror as the "true nature" of Soviet history. This focus on terror should be combined with an explicitly moral and political judgement which condemns Soviet modernization as an extreme "deviation" from "normal history".¹⁰² Leaving aside the heroic pretension of having discerned the "normal" course of history, such a polarization seems to be more likely speaking the language of Russian exceptionalism than to enable theoretical insights into the dynamics of Soviet reforms.

On the contrary, studying *Richard Pipes'* explicitly normative functionalization of the concept of totalitarianism reveals to what extent it had to misinterpret the change of Soviet politics which set in with Gorbachev. Pipes ascribed the singularity of Russian totalitarianism not so much to Marxism but to peculiar conditions difficult to understand for Western-minded scientists: to the aggressive basic attitude of a state which has been urging territorial expansion for several centuries; to the fact that the autocratic organisation of domination has never been relativized by feudal structures or counterbalanced by a bourgeoisie; to the absence of traditions of property rights; to a peasant population kept in bondage with no rights, and to the inertia of a "political culture" deeply moulded by these peculiarities.

Further deviating from the classic concept of totalitarianism, Pipes ascribes only a secondary role to the idea of socialism in the formulation of Soviet policy. While it was quite capable of socially extending democracy in the context of a Western culture of political freedom and private ownership, the idea of socialism in Russia was brought into line with the all too powerful imperial tradition: "The explanation for Soviet totalitarianism must be sought not in socialism but in the political culture which draws on socialist ideas to justify totalitarian practices."¹⁰³ The imperviousness of the Bolshevik regime is thus based on the actualization of

¹⁰¹ Conquest 1966, 71.

¹⁰² Conquest 1993, 93.

¹⁰³ Pipes 1984, 21. Consequently, "Russian totalitarianism" would by no means have fallen apart with the end of the Soviet Union, but live on in Russian exceptionalism and imperial ambitions conning the "near abroad".

autocratic expansionism in the name of a world revolution which followed no other law than the 300-year impetus for conquest - a combination, which made any hope for evolution or modernization futile: "Here no sociological or other 'scientific' theories are of much help."¹⁰⁴ The normative message, which Pipes substitutes for social science analysis, consisted of the warning that the Soviet Union was by nature aggressive: "by definition incapable of evolution from within and impervious to change from without"¹⁰⁵ - a message which was to be understood during the time when he was an adviser for the Reagan administration as a political statement in the strict sense.¹⁰⁶

Whilst Pipes degrades Marxism to an extrinsic ideology of legitimization, *Martin Malta* tries to deduce the entire Soviet history from the "logic" of Leninism. Accordingly, the totalitarian intention¹⁰⁷ of integral revolutionary socialism aimed at abolishing private property, market and profit. Its realization was not so much characterized by an effective domination of society and the extent of open terror, but by the institutional subordination of politics, economy and culture under a party-state which legitimated itself as the agent of historical progress. Therefore, the primacy of power over economic development processes, established by Lenin, already received its basic institutional form during War Communism: the party's leading role, the parallel structure of administration and political control, as well as the central planning system. All initiatives of "soft communism", from the New Economic Policy of the 1920s to Perestroika, stood no chance against the cast-iron logic of this institutional ensemble. In this sense, Soviet history did not follow the path of "modernization", but unfurled its basic institutional structure. Hence, there were no internal alternatives.¹⁰⁸ Attempts of reform aimed at the continuation of the Utopian project under critical conditions.

In trying to explain the realization of the totalitarian "logic" of domination, as well as the development phases of the Soviet model and its final crisis, Malia also

¹⁰⁴ Pipes 1984, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Pipes 1984b, 49. In a similar alarmist sense, Conquest (1986, Epilogue) supposed, as a topical implication of his history of Stalinist terror, that the present leaders of the system mostly unchanged since 1934, could also be prepared to take part in a war with millions of victims.

¹⁰⁶ In the early 1980s, Pipes had considerable influence on the formulation of armament policy of the United States. As a member of the *Committee on the Present Danger*, Pipes was appointed by Reagan (himself a member) as specialist on Soviet and East European affairs on the *National Security Council*. From 1981 to 1983 he advocated not only the containment but the roll back of communism by economical and ideological warfare. After being replaced by the more pragmatic Jack Matlock, Pipes, along with several anti-Soviet members of the first Reagan administration, joined the *Committee for the Free World*, which was strongly opposed to the first meeting of Gorbachev and Reagan and to any talks with the Soviets at all. See Garthoff 1994, 11-14, 104-105 and 249: cf. Talbott 1984, 222-223.

¹⁰⁷ Malia 1990, 300-301. An intentionalist and mitigated concept of totalitarianism is now also being advocated by Connor 1996, 5-6: "(...) not, to be sure, in the sense of full and active conformity to the Friedrich-Brzezinski six point-model any longer".

¹⁰⁸ As Malia maintains against Arendt, who regarded the continuation of the New Economic Policy as a "clear alternative" to Stalin's seizure of power and the installation of a system of total rule (Arendt 1966, 484, fn. 15).

freely refers to the entire spectrum of the incriminated liberalist Soviet research: the economic diagnosis that the economic model of extensive growth has reached its internal and external limits, as well as the sociological analysis of a social structure which has fundamentally changed and which excluded the revival of the ancient regime even with authoritarian measures. But how was it possible to break up the iron cage of the totalitarian institutions? Symptomatically, Malia can only answer this question, which is so decisive for his approach, by referring to an arch-"revisionist" thesis: „The country was swept with a wave of self-organisation from below; popular fronts and embryonic trade union associations appeared in the cities of Russia and the Ukraine. Thus 'civil society', as the opposition called these new formations, began to emerge for the first time since it has been suppressed in 1918."¹⁰⁹

6. Conclusion

If my assessment is correct, the neo-totalitarian explanations of the Soviet breakdown are neither coherent nor can they offer a well-founded theory of the social organisation of domination. It is true that some of the modernization theory "revisionists" have shared the reform optimism of Soviet Perestroika-Sociology, which had broken up the monolithic image of a "totalitarian" Soviet society. However, there are no signs that Pipes' perspective, based on the "state school" of Russian historiography, or Malia's and Furet's ideographic approach, are permitting deeper insights into the dynamics of Soviet socialism.

If the retrospective attempts to explain the socialist breakdown are evaluated by their insights into the long-term dynamics of East European societies, then none of them would have been able to "foresee" the time and course of the change in Soviet politics which began in the mid-1980s.¹¹⁰ Why did the "house of cards" not fall apart already in 1941 under the Nazi-attack, in 1953 with Stalin's death, in 1956 with the onset of the Thaw and the Polish and Hungarian upheavals, in 1968 under the impression of the Prague Spring or 1983 after Breshnev's death? How were reform groups and politicians like Gorbachev able to rise inside the Communist Party and finally prepared to dismantle the whole system?¹¹¹ How was it possible that a reform intelligentsia - also in social science - emerged in official institutions within the 'most total totalitarianism', which "reprogrammed the software in a myriad of little decisions, right until the hardware's final spectacular

¹⁰⁹ Malia 1990, 328.

¹¹⁰ Heller & Nekrich 1981, for instance, emphasized the system's stability and its "successes of foreign policy throughout the world" in the final remarks of their totalitarian-theoretical history of the Soviet Union.

¹¹¹ As Daniels (1993, 58) asks - a question which obviously even astonished Malia (1994, Epilogue).

implosion in 1991?"¹¹² Why did the perestroika-reforms break out in the Russian centre and not in the periphery - where they contrarily met resistance?¹¹³ How would Pipes want to interpret Gorbachev's initiatives for disarmament or the peaceful abandonment of the Central East European empire?

The downfall of the Soviet Union, easily ascertained post mortem, leaves us with a number of open questions revealing the shortcomings of the neo-totalitarian approaches as social science theory. The action theoretical defects of their historico-philosophical teleology of failure are complementary to the justly criticized logic of progress articulated by orthodox modernization theory. The, as it is, negative action theory of the neo-totalitarians corresponded to the experience of powerlessness of East European dissidents. It conjured the futility of system-immanent changes in Soviet-type societies - and thereby was not able to perceive the actors of systemic change anymore. The change in interests, the political strategies and ideological re-orientations which led to the dissolution of Soviet society by a series of changing coalitions and non-intended consequences of action were not systematically analysed, but integrated *ad hoc* into the neo-totalitarian approach.¹¹⁴

Thus, it is no surprise that Malia does not even try to present his neo-totalitarian approach as a contribution to scientific research but as a reinterpretation of concepts already known. The conceptual approach he is referring to is not the classical totalitarianism theory but Alexander Gerschenkron's hypothesis on economic backwardness in Russia complemented by some sociological theorems on partial and imbalanced modernization, well-known through the work of Bendix, Moore, Eisenstadt, Rueschemeyer and Huntington.¹¹⁵ Moreover, relying heavily on the results of "revisionist" research, Malia admits that the socio-historical "revisionism" earned some merits in revealing the interaction between state and society even during hard-core Stalinism.¹¹⁶ In a similar way, Bence and

¹¹² As Strobe Talbott writes in his Preface to Arbatov 1992, a very informative internal history of the emergence of the later Perestroika-intelligentsia.

¹¹³ Namely in the GDR, in Bulgaria, Romania and the CSSR, in contrast to Hungary and Poland.

¹¹⁴ Comisso 1991, 88-89, argues in a similar ad hoc way. Her "'new' totalitarianism theory" tries to integrate the changes in social structure and the sphere of values, and the co-optation policy of the Communist Party, etc. as demonstrated by the modernization theorists in Soviet research. "Totalitarianism", however, is thereby reduced to the leadership's ideologically motivated refusal to face the political implications of these changes. Karklins 1994, here 31, even goes so far as to explain the Soviet downfall by Gorbachev's mistake: "like many Westerners, he did not see the Soviet system as totalitarian and therefore dichotomous to other systems". If so, it would be necessary to explain why Gorbachev's conservative enemies could not stop him and make him face totalitarianism, but how he was able to force the entire system to collapse. Both authors presupposed an erosion of "totalitarian rule" without being able to seize it with the methods of totalitarianism theory; at most, both confirm the complementary error of totalitarianism theory and the communist leadership which was identified by v.Beyme 1994 (see above, fn. 75): to believe in the apparatus' effectiveness.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Gerschenkron 1952, Eisenstadt 1964, Huntington 1965, and Rueschemeyer 1976.

¹¹⁶ Malia 1994, ch. 7, where Malia refers to the research of Sheila Fitzpatrick.

Lipset conclude their critique of Sovietology with the perspective which Jerry Hough already introduced 15 years ago: returning to Weber and Parsons.¹¹⁷

Therefore, the mediation between the totalitarianism model and social science approaches which Odom suggests, could be agreed to at least in so far as it reaches beyond the anti-sociological prejudice of his historiographic colleagues and recommends a return of post-communist studies to the mainstream of comparative social science: „(...) the old totalitarian model could have been richly supplemented by numerous 'theories of middle range'. (...) we could have kept much of the macro model's perspective and at the same time explained the microbehaviour more precisely, either as being consistent with it or slowly eroding its applicability."¹¹⁸ This is the path which the research on Eastern Europe after 1989 has actually taken. Post-communist studies have seen an explosive growth of the "social science approach" in the course of which many "revisionist" theorems have been refuted, modified or confirmed. Continuities in research on old topics like elite circulation, networking, political culture, national traditions, regional fragmentation, etc. have not underlined the impression of a "totalitarian society", but exposed "a crisis of a state without a political system (...): a power over the fate of many people, but actual powerless in regard to the process in general."¹¹⁹ New approaches, theories of rational choice, institution-building, transitions to democracy etc., have been integrated into the field. The overestimated growth rates of Soviet-type economies have been recalculated, the causes of their decay were layed open. Even the CIA has been vindicated for its supposedly failed prognoses.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, the wave of social science theories entering the East European studies does not imply a way back to the golden age of classic modernization theory. The lesson to be learned from (neo-)totalitarianism theory concerns the stress it lays on domination and its specific irrationalities, variables which were indeed neglected by mainstream sociology and, after the Soviet breakdown, are ignored by liberalist optimism of neoclassic reform programmes.¹²¹ The drama of the post-communist crises reminds us that there are no hidden hands and no evolutionary universals which would lead, quasi automatically, to "modernity". On the other hand, the lesson to be learned from the "social science approach" is that even the "most total totalitarianism" did not result from a "logic" of history, but from certain constellations of interests, reciprocities between rulers and ruled, institutions of administration and value commitments, etc. which are quite accessible to a reconstruction in sociological terms.

¹¹⁷ Bence & Lipset 1994.

¹¹⁸ Odom 1992, 81.

¹¹⁹ Lewin 1995, 297 and 121..

¹²⁰ Berkowitz & Richelson 1995.

¹²¹ See Mueller 1995, 274-285.

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