

## INTRODUCTION

Change in Progress

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In Central and Eastern Europe, a region where artists once risked their lives for creative honesty, a television advertisement now features young, free urban women driving tractors through a field playfully, without purpose. The viewer from the region recognizes the joke immediately; the socialist-realist image of a young woman driving a tractor simultaneously symbolized equality and the duty that everyone must work. This single scenario illustrates how radical has been the shift in the production of cultural forms in Eastern Europe since 1989. In this one example, we see the advent of product advertisements, the celebration of unrestricted joyful leisure, the freedom to lampoon the previous system through a mass medium, a new cult of youth, a rejection of top-down imposed gender equality, and the value of choice. One result of the 1989 lifting of a decades-old political lid was an expressed revival of "culture." As national boundaries were redrawn, for example, the changes were often framed as a return to culture, whether expressed as claims to language rights, recovery of national symbols, religious revivals, revision of political norms, or memory of an elite literati. Accompanying the revived traditions, however, were noticeable beginnings of cultural novelties, both imported and invented, uniquely indigenous or in newly blended forms. Among the reasons for the complexity of these forms are two simultaneous opportunities: the chance for single nations to return to a self that they perceived as "authentic"-that is, not committee-imposed-and the overnight entry into the phenomenon of globalization that was already in process.

Ten years following the fall of the Berlin wall, a group of scholars gathered in Kraków, Poland to share their latest empirical research on the unique changes in the cultures of Central and Eastern Europe and New Independent States over the previous decade. "Cultural Transformations and Civil Society: Reflecting on a Decade of Change" was the title of the conference that gathered this cross-disciplinary group of scholars from various corners of the region. "This conference is a mosaic," observed participant Bissera Zankova, "which is exactly what is happening in the region." In fact, among the most striking results of the past ten years is the broad range of cultural forms that are transforming. In "the region," broadcast media struggle with the meanings of regulation in free-market conditions; artists work to fill an aesthetic void left when their previous underground and defiant moral visions are less relevant; daily work life offers a new foreign

corporate climate; and communities debate which histories to preserve in their landscapes and which to demolish. The mosaic pieces may appear unrelated, even disjointed, and are certainly in varying states of repair. Side-by-side, however, the tiles form some observable patterns.

Although the changes in the region that might be labeled "cultural" are quite visible and significant, much of the social science research in the past ten years has focused on political and economic restructuring. Clearly, what the year 1989 represents is a revolution in governing and economic systems. Yet when one examines this transformation at close range, it becomes clear that this is also, centrally, a cultural transformation. The transformation must pave its way on the basis of, and in close conversation with, changes in ideologies, habits, self-fashioning, community identities, landscape aesthetics, and musical representation. Often, it has been the case that students of the transformation work through their research into the directions that post-communist societies are taking, only to end with some unexplainable mysteries. In 1999 in a Polish city, for example, residents will still choose to spend hours in an outdoor queue to pay their telephone bills, an act that will save them less than a handful of change. They go for the atmosphere and the community, not for the savings. This defies standard expectations that human behavior will follow a model of rational choice. The student of such behavior reaches the conclusion that such behavior ultimately has something to do with culture. Organizers of this 1999 conference decided to begin, rather than end, with the study of culture. The goal was to support the development of new, grounded empirical research into the changing mosaic pieces of cultures in the region. Our hope was that this effort would help to build a broad foundation of knowledge that is based on balanced, detailed study. Certainly, these are not the first of such studies; a number of areas, such as religion and nationalism, are gaining growing attention from scholars. Yet scholarship on culture is often the last to receive research support, and perhaps the undertaking still suffers from old ideas that culture is an epiphenomenon or a luxury. The reader need only read through a few of these essays to recognize the need for such studies. We offer this effort as a beginning toward coordinated support for future expanded endeavors.

#### The New Mosaic Tiles

"Do you want to save changes to Poland?" asked the computer as it closed a document entitled "Poland" from one conference applicant. This prescient question would emerge as one of the undercurrents of conference discussions. To outsiders returning to Poland since 1989, those changes appear dramatic, observed Mark Toner of the U.S. Consulate in Krakow, during his introductory remarks to conference participants. To Western eyes, the world east of the former iron curtain appears to have all of the marks of globalization and a hybrid form of east-meets-west: from colorful, alluring

billboard advertisements to Slavic reggae music. This is most evident in the world of material culture; the gray of socialist-era landscapes has been attacked with a passion. Brilliant palettes of colors have been painted on every corner of public landscapes-including the bodies of consumers. At the turn of the century, there are no apparent "inter-cultural lags" between eastern and western material or popular cultural forms. "But when you ask Poles about changes," Mr. Toner continued, "they will say that maybe things are a little better, or they're a little worse."

Ten years, in fact, is a short time span in which to observe cultural change if one considers the magnitude of cultural processes that direct whole societies, from conceptions of the good life to language development. Yet an analysis of any era within a society necessarily reveals what Raymond Williams called "structures of feeling"-particular shared understandings that characterize that historical epoch. Such analysis is far from simple. In this region, for example, neither the insider nor the outsider tours the terrain of changes without a few blind spots. Foreign visitors who stop to listen to street musicians in Budapest or Prague are rarely aware that, as Marian-Bălașa writes here, such performances were forbidden in the pre-1989 public sphere without official state sponsorship. It is understandable that the insiders have a few blind spots as well. The pace at which individual consumer-citizens in this region must now move to keep a step ahead and to comprehend new realities, leaves little time to reflect on the depth or meanings of changes.

This conference provided an opportunity for these consumer-citizen scholars to stop and grapple with the rapidly changing cultural worlds in which they inhabit, move around, and negotiate. These scholars offered their own thick descriptions of details of these changes and compared their observations with one another. In the spirit of open discourse and mutual exchange, we placed no borders around the definition of the concept of "culture," which is evident as one thumbs through the pages of these proceedings. From conference presentations, we learned the nuances of everyday meanings as experienced "on the street," such as the habits of standing in queues, as well as the re-creation of societal identities within newly-defined geographical borders. We discussed and compared landscape changes, new public musical performances, and the bold world of product advertisements. We analyzed the creation of new legal and ethical norms to address the massive social changes in the region.

#### The Patterns Appear: Resymbolization

Present circumstances in Central and Eastern Europe, participant Meskova writes, have the character of "temporality"-they exist in a gap between past and future, "between failed socialism and successful capitalism, totalitarianism and democracy." In this conference, we dared to look for a few emerging social patterns from the mosaic while these societies are still moving through this temporal gap. Thus, patterns continue to shift even as we

examine them. Many inhabitants of this region prefer the term "transformation" over that of "transition" as a description of this moment in history: the latter term implies that there is a fixed, visible endpoint-in particular, Western democracy and market capitalism. It is not yet evident whether the changing societies in the region will culminate in these particular option. Although this is a simple linguistic preference, this semantic point al 0 reflects a desire for citizens to be active creators of the system and its accompanying cultures that will eventually emerge. Some Poles, for example, often use the phrase "building democracy," acknowledging an unfinished, gradual job that must be created from the ground up. The image evoked here certainly parallels that of the Gdansk monument built by Solidarity trade union members to commemorate the murdered shipyard workers from the 1970 uprising. The three massive crosses bearing ship anchors appear to have broken explosively through the soil-simulated in concrete-representing the irrepressible, universal need for freedom . Despite the belief that these emerging democracies are far from finished, many refer to the need to draw a "thick black line" between the pre-1989 reality and today-a metaphor proffered by Poland's first post-1989 prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki. In a normative sense at least, this choice of a metaphor represents a desire to view 1989 as a major juncture not to be re-crossed. Many of the conference essays, in fact, focus on the problem of "doing democracy": involving new institutional structures, ideas, and habits.

Among the more visible changes in the cultural landscape are those involving symbols. Symbols-and the meanings that they evoke-are currently in various stages of demolition, replacement, preservation, and reconstruction throughout the region. This anomie in the symbolic marketplace by no means indicates that symbols are the forgotten ornaments in a new landscape of inflation, business competition, loss of governmental social protections, and unemployment. On the contrary, Central and Eastern Europeans continue to give significant attention to symbol-creation or revival, as they destroy the rejected representations and attempt to redefine themselves as a community. For example, after 1945, the communist government had the crown moved from the head of the white eagle on the Polish national coat of arms. This act was intended to dethrone any elements of monarchy or aristocracy from the "collective imagination," to control the meaning of the Polish nation in a new form. The extent to which Poles viewed this as a gesture of violation was evident in the speed with which the crown reappeared in 1989. Within days of the first free elections, nearly every Polish national eagle's head was re-crowned-with hastily cut paper or aluminum constructions designed by millions of individuals.

In recent years, in fact, the monarchy has made its symbolic reappearance in a number of forms, including the commercial marketplace, where, ironically, the new Pole and the new Russian (the nouveaux riches, to

generalize) can choose an elite brand of cigarettes named after King Jan Sobieski III and Peter I, respectively. Both examples illustrate the attraction of pre-communist national history as resources for a reconstructed national community, propelling into the present a romanticized age of innocence, power, and pride. Yet the prospect of an actual return to monarchical rule does not make its way into the public discourse, outside of a minute minority of Russian survey respondents who agree that "a return to the Tsar would be better" (See Zassorin's essay in this volume).

Other pre-1989 symbols have remained physically intact, with their associated meanings dislocated. For example, while Budapest, Hungary has built its own museum to house the unused Lenins and other visages of the communist past, there are cities in the former Soviet Republics who chose, freely, not to remove the hammers and sickles from their landscapes. Such symbols had been familiar parts of the citizens' reality for so long that there was little interest in their removal. In other cases, the symbols did not change for other reasons. In the case of the hand-embroidered Soviet emblem patterns in the stage curtains of Moscow's Bolshoi Theater, the work has taken on the aura of "art," and thus remains juxtaposed beneath the matching crimson valence embroidered with the Russian tsarist emblems.

Bizarre as it may seem, a major cultural change underlies some decisions to preserve such communist-era symbols, since such decisions represent the result of the autonomous will of a publicly assembled community. The symbols may take on reconstructed meanings, since they were figuratively moved into a new context—they are transformed into objects of memory rather than representations of a present or future society. As Berger (1995: 125) has suggested, "Cultural objects accumulate (and lose) meaning over time through changing contextual influences on the interpretations that get attached to and loosened from them by the actions of potentially identifiable persons and groups."

A further example of meaning reconstruction is the imposing Palace of Culture that towers over Warsaw's urban space, until recently the central "skyscraper" in the city skyline. Perhaps the most despised symbol in present-day Poland, Poles would have taken sledgehammers to this building in 1989, had it been feasible. The officially narrated story is that this building was a 1950s gift from Stalin to the nation of Poland. Many Poles remember, however, that it was Polish workers, not the Soviet government, who paid for the construction of this massive structure, through involuntary contributions deducted from their paychecks to purchase the needed coupons. Outsiders who have no personal access to the collective memory that feeds such strong emotions toward the structure often find the building architecturally appealing. An American observed, "I think it would look great in Detroit." An effort to tackle the problem of how to deal with this "gift" in the post-1989 context was a design competition to solicit creative alternatives to the building

in its current state. Among the entries was a proposal to enclose the entire building in a massive glass case, in effect humorously situating the palace within a set of quotation marks in a sort of petrification. Clearly, this style of meaning reconstruction varies from that of the communities who left the former symbols intact. Today, the palace exemplifies temporality; it is a monumental mnemonic, retaining its structure and facade, but with new functions that reflect its prime commercial value, including a discotheque, an upscale shopping center, and offices for private firms. It is a structural, rather than symbolic, function that preserves the palace.

There are additional reasons for the static existence of Soviet-era symbols. We cannot dismiss the fact that, as Zassorin writes in his essay in this volume, a nostalgia for the Soviet empire has appeared in some minor segments of present-day Russian political culture. Boda has documented a level of similar public nostalgia in Hungary for the Kadar regime. Secondly, while some monuments are removable, other images—such as the socialist-realist art chiseled in stone reliefs on building facades—are less feasibly removed. Yet the same can be said of many monarchical national symbols that survived the communist reconstruction. The double-headed eagle representing tsarist Russia never moved from its prominent place on the wall inside St. Petersburg's Marinskii Theater.

#### New Groupings in the Mosaic

The re-establishment of identity markings—whose memory remained alive for 45 years—calls to mind the most disturbing of the region's cultural changes: the re-emergence of nationalism and ethnic hostilities. In the weeks leading up to the Krakow conference, NATO launched air strikes against the republic of Yugoslavia in response to the Serbian purge of ethnic Albanians from the province of Kosovo. The resulting international attention given to what was previously viewed as a local matter placed the years of socialist rule in perspective. Those years had silenced, but not relieved, the tensions between cultures that had survived a multi-generational history. John Keane (1995: 196) warns against interpreting this current rise in ethno-nationalism as a product of a single cause, such as democratization or the experience of communism. Keane instead identifies the complex processes that contribute to the current rise of nationalisms; democracy may facilitate a society's embrace of nationalist ideologies, but this embrace appears in a context of insecurity and disequilibrium, where nationalist politics seem to offer the only alternative (Keane 1995:196). Zassorin's essay in this volume offers a detailed illustration about how this has happened in the case of Russia, where ultra-nationalist political parties hold the strongest attraction for segments of the population who were the most vulnerable in the transition to capitalism. The search for scapegoats has resulted in explicit racist rhetoric in political campaigns.

The opening of borders and the disappearance of total state control in most corners of the region have made landscapes more widely accessible. As a result, and in the context of national memory reconstruction, groups have begun to make claims to places of community memory that are simultaneously claimed by other groups. Slawomir Kapralski, in his keynote address to the conference, described how this conflict is being expressed in monumentation and pilgrimages to sites in southern Poland. With the near absence of a Polish Jewish community in many cities of Poland, new monuments by Polish Gentiles largely represent a Polish history that is distinct from both Communist-Polish history and Jewish-Polish history. Religion represents one field in which this reconstruction is carried out: a dominant theme in the reconstruction of Polish national memory—for those who feel it was displaced by communist symbols and externally imposed interpretations of the nation—has been the revived association between Poland and the Catholic Church. An extreme version of this tendency was "played out" on the remaining grounds of the Auschwitz death camps, where individuals planted numerous crosses in defiance of international Jewish requests to remove a cross from the grounds. Kapralski speaks of Polish schoolchildren who have been raised to see Auschwitz as "perhaps the sacred place of Polish national memory of heroic struggle against all odds," making the site a powerful locus for presentation of national identity. Reinforcing this fact is that for today's Poland to return to its pre-communist past in order to "pick up the story" where it last left off, is to return to the time of Holocaust. The division of Polish Jewish and Gentile histories, coupled with the religious divide between Catholicism and Judaism, create a memory battlefield where inter-group resentments fester.

There are at least two sides to this particular coin, however. As conference participants discovered, a Krakow tourist industry is now able to develop on the basis of growing appreciation for and curiosity about Jewish history in the region. If anti-Semitism is making yet another public reappearance, so is its opposition. The same opening of borders is fostering cross-national diplomatic cooperation between, for example, Israel and Poland. There is no question that anti-Semitism is vocalized in political campaigns in, for example, Russian national elections. Zassorin points out here, however, that according to Russian public opinion polls, among a list of 16 groups sometimes blamed for the country's economic woes, Jews rank toward the bottom of that list. This illustrates one of the regional changes that is rarely considered to be newsworthy: the ethnic diversity that has been stimulated by the disappearance of state-imposed homogenization, which has not yet taken the form of ethnic or national separatism. Yet this process also demands its architects. Now that minority languages have a relative freedom to thrive in the region, the educational system faces the challenge of accommodating sub-national minorities, new immigrants, and the reversal of

linguistic hegemony in the former Soviet republics. In Lithuania, for example, as Dirgela writes in this volume, the Lithuanian language has largely displaced Russian as the language of official discourse. Schools must give more attention to the Lithuanian language than in the past, as they simultaneously accommodate the Russian language in its new status as a minority language. Now that the former republics are regaining sovereignty, the Russian residents find themselves members of a diaspora, adjusting to their identity as a sub-national minority group. The openings provide spaces for individuals and communities to take new control of the more recent historical record. A profound and ethically complex result of the new openings is the revelation of previously hidden information. The "local knowledge"-shared understandings by citizens regarding the fates of dissidents under the former system could finally be verified and publicly acknowledged. In the spaces left free by demolished monuments, Central and Eastern Europeans are raising new memorial structures, accompanied by old and new rituals. Among the most striking examples are those that commemorate the victims of communism, often located, quite logically, in cemeteries.

#### The Tiles Embedded: Markets and Marketplaces

The rapidly changing market and marketplace provide stages for many of the processes that the conference participants analyzed. Simple everyday habits, such as the waits in long queues for scarce goods before 1989, have been transformed, as have workplace styles and availability of global cultural goods. Yet the market is not a monolithic force; it currently works as both constrainer and enabler in cultural change.

The workplace, in fact, finds its way into several essays in this volume. Anisimova, for example, studied work habits in a Russian branch office of a Danish firm. Her research revealed surprises that go contrary to popular wisdom: Danish employees were the ones who were more accustomed to a community-oriented workplace culture, while the Russian workers pursued a more individualistic style. Yet rather than relegating these differences either to varying "national" characters or to the communist versus capitalist work ethics, Anisimova noted that the tensions between styles stemmed from a combination of several sources. In her essay on Bulgarian organizations, Greenberg discusses the individualism that characterizes Bulgarian workers despite the near absence of reformed enterprises or state structures. Yet another perspective on this is present in Tchistiakova's article on the reform of the Russian defense industry. Some firms see themselves as "islands of socialism," continuing to provide the social and family supports that the state can no longer afford. The marketplace of the arts has faced its own upheavals. Russian poet Anna Akhmatova once was forced to compose each line of poetry, memorize, and burn it to leave no physical traces of her work. Most aesthetic workers in

today's Central and Eastern Europe face challenges in getting their work to the public other than that of physical danger. A Polish poster artist describes the new climate for his work, remembering the pre-1989 situation where the political poster was required to pass a series of censors and party officials:

Today all this has changed. I now work alone, I have no idea where my poster will appear, in what kind of environment. I paint posters like others paint pictures, never knowing where it will finally be hung, where it will find its place. (Lenica 1996,p.71)

This artist now has a multiplicity of outlets for his work, from corporate promotion to social causes advanced by newly created non-governmental organizations. The increase in the number of outlets is not necessarily a signal that a new day of artistic comfort has now dawned. The Central and Eastern European artist is caught in the whirlwind of "temporality" described above, with the loss of large-scale state funding to underwrite the arts, and the commercial pressures that mass media and marketing create. A new division appears within the artistic community, with a self-defined "underground" on one side and the more market-oriented on the other.

The Russian rock-and-roll musician, Yoffe writes here, faced a similar identity crisis with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In light of the need to sell their wares in the free market, including the international market, the musician's passionate anti-Soviet texts, with little attention to musicianship, were left without audiences. Y offe provides his own unique account of whether the Russian rock music industry has overcome this crisis. Other research presented here outlines the implications for the construction of Central and Eastern Europe as a new market playground for foreign firms. The cultural products of advertising images and broadcast media (analyzed here by Gajda-Laszewska and Zankova, respectively) appear on this playground where there are no pre-existing regulations. The result is a series of convergences and conflicts between local and international norms, and a need for new institutional regulatory responses.

The Krakow conference itself, as a cultural event, both represented and participated in the changing academic market in the region. Hampered by the erosion of state funding and in need of redefinition in many fields, higher education in Central and Eastern Europe has not yet emerged from its crisis. This conference, and the resulting publication, are situated as potential-though modest-agents of cultural change, as scholars gain new access to international arena and seek markets for their "products." As I read these papers once again, I notice the modesty, even apologies, by some authors for their entries, due to their insecurity that they are "behind" or "out of touch" with other scholarship in their fields. I counter such modesty with gratitude by those of us who organized such a conference precisely because of our limited

access to these scholars' cultural worlds. We needed to hear the thickness of the descriptions that those who have lived through the changes can only provide. The result, in fact, is a document that gives one the feeling of being "on the ground" in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Kazakhstan.

#### Self-Reflecting Mosaics

The cultural representations, whether inherited, invented, or reconstructed, are offering the region a series of mirrors in which societies are viewing and reviewing themselves. To use the Sociologist Erving Goffman's division of our routine daily performances into a front and a back region, or a front and a back stage, it is the front region that has now disappeared. In the absence of the previous state's performances, which gave the region's societies a glow of success and possibility—even including a glorification of national cultures through officially sponsored folk-dance teams—the back region is now fully exposed. Among the examples of the exchange of a front for a back region are the street name changes throughout the region, which could be described as a "hero substitution." Yet this very act has given some self-reflective citizens in the region pause, as they ask why these particular heroes were chosen. They recognize that although their society is no longer subject to the myths imposed from above, it has, in its stead, carved out its own invented traditions: only certain heroes, from certain glorious national pasts, have been chosen. The present day also offers a potent source for such myth-making. Major avenues in Poland are now named for Pope John Paul II, a present-day hero who has provided spiritual leadership for many and is given major credit for the official discrediting of the former system.

Perhaps it is ironic that one of those exposures of a society's back region is, literally, a theater performance. One of the conference events was the performance of a drama entitled "Agnes," which re-enacts a true story of a woman who suffered from child sexual abuse. Among the many silences reinforced by the pre-1989 state was the reality of family violence. The performance positions itself as an educational piece, and the director and actors take the play into schools and public theaters. The conference provided the stage and audience for this drama, and, in fact, the performance and discussion did act as a temporary moment of social exposure, as conference participants admitted to the absence of public dialogue in their countries about this problem. Poland in particular had been known for its underground theater during the socialist era, although the state was usually the target of the satire. "Agnes" may represent the beginning of a new generation of oppositional drama in a greatly transformed context.

The newly exposed back region itself, therefore, now provides material for artistic reflection. In this vein, we quote an over-sized blue canvas, painted by Hungarian artist Benczur Enese and displayed in the post-1989 cross-regional contemporary art exhibit, "After the Wall," in Budapest

during the summer of 2000. We present the quote as a possible hypothesis, among others, of what the citizen-consumer-scholars have documented here:

#### "THE CHANGES RENDER VISIBLE THE FOUNDATION"

##### The Remaining Tiles

No conference can claim to survey the entire terrain of its problematic. In this case, two of the areas of cultural change that were not represented in the presentations explicitly were religion and gender. Both are implicitly present in any discussions of national or ethnic identity, and religion was a central thematic in Dr. Kapralski's keynote address on monumentation. Zassorin's analysis of Russian political culture indicates how Russian orthodoxy is returning to a symbolic place as representation of the nation. Yet both themes—religion and gender—require their own social-scientific analyses as well. It can only be mentioned here, briefly, that the region has seen an explosive change in the religious landscape, from religious revivals of previously suppressed faiths, to the presence of new religious movements and missionizing groups from abroad, to pockets of decline in religious affiliation. The new institutional role of religions in a changed political climate that requires a multi-faceted civil society is still in the process of definition. New public debates regarding gender role expectations and gender equality protections have also appeared as societies search for new, revived, or revised rules around which to organize themselves. These debates appear in a public arena of competing norms, including international human rights discourses, religious proscriptions of family roles, and backlashes against any political ideology suffixed with an "ism,"—in particular, that of feminism. These debates bleed into other spheres, as religion and gender interact with the processes of ethnic re-identification.

##### The Movement of "Culture"

If theories that "culture" and cultural forms live relatively autonomous lives apart from other spheres of human activity need further evidence, Eastern Europe provides it. Cultures and cultural forms are born, grow, develop, change, and die with their own internal, historically specific logic. Yet these forms do not move through these life cycles in a vacuum, as they are subject to vicissitudes in markets, political power struggles, natural disasters, and technological developments. Cultural forms, in turn, stamp their own flavors back onto these very vicissitudes. In Central and Eastern Europe, all of these complex patterns of cultural change are present. We see inherited, created, blended, transformed, and abandoned forms of culture moving through the rapidly changing world of political and economic reconfigurations. We see play and we see destruction. The essays here illustrate how these changes are not disembodied, ghostly processes, but are

the products of human agents, whose will, passion, imagination, and even neglect fuel their development.

At some level, cultural change appears out of step with other social changes. For example, the absence of state ideological control has allowed a new freedom in travel and communication; one need only survey the departure board of the Moscow international airport, listing destinations in every continent. Yet such journeys are available only to the international visitor and the new Russian whose wages exceed the \$50.00 monthly average. Correspondingly, the internet revolution—a source of knowledge and cross-national communication—has yet to reach many East Europeans for the same reasons: financial constraints. This is an issue that Mussina addresses in her essay, "Bringing Teenagers into the World Democratic Society through E-mail." On the other hand, within the space of a few years, computer access is one area in which the region has witnessed explosive technological changes. There is certainly no inter-cultural lag in this respect, as the growing number of those with computer access allows a society to jump over decades of technological developments. In 1997, for example, I introduced a group of Central and Eastern European students to the internet during a course on the mass media. Most had never had any previous exposure to the medium. In 2000, I taught a similar group of students. I knew better than to bother with an internet session. One student, in fact, gave a presentation of his self-authored CD-Rom about his home city, complete with moving video. The recent experiences in this region, however, also defy any attempt to view the cultural "variable" reductionistically, as the core engine for other changes. For example, the political and economic unevenness that can be observed between countries such as Poland and Belarus may be the result of a complex web of reasons, including geography and economic histories. Yet the lay observer often comments that the variations are due to differences in mentality—Poles, in this version of the story, possess the type of character that "wants change." This particular question is an area that calls out for more grounded, cross-national scholarship. Although culture, and cultures, certainly change at a snail's pace in many aspects, these essays illustrate how necessary it is for our theories of cultural change to be historically specific. An examination of the mentalities, mores, attitudes, habits, and beliefs of the region's younger generations, many of which are in stark contrast to those of their elders, provides a striking illustration of this truth. Some changes can become embedded in certain sectors of society quite quickly. Taking the example of the CD-Rom authorship mentioned above, we not only view changes across the temporal boundary of 1989, but we can also identify novelties even within the past decade.

### The Mosaic of the Book

True to the conference organizational design, the essays in this book are grouped thematically rather than by discipline. Thus, the reader finds varying perspectives on a number of cultural processes that are observable in the region: tradition revived and contested, inventions and innovations, new publics, and the politics of culture. We use this approach to encourage cross-disciplinary and cross-national dialogue. Conference participants listened openly to presentations on objects outside of their fields and found a unique richness in these discussions.

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Czech Ragtime Band Oil the Charles Bridge in Prague



## The Place of the Past

