[1–2022]

# dějiny–teorie–kritika

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# INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING THE FUTURE AS A CULTURE OF DEFEAT – EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN IMAGINED FUTURES SINCE 1945[1]

Stanislav Holubec

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Studying changing perceptions of the future belongs to the well-known field of cultural history. Scholarly works dealing with the 20th century concentrate mainly on the history of science fiction,[2] expert knowledge (future studies),[3] and the history of future forecasting in popular culture (technology, lifestyle, work).[4] By presenting this thematic issue, we aim to connect the changing perception of modern radical concepts of the future with the concept of the "culture of defeat" developed by Wolfgang Schivelbusch, applied to two Eastern and Central

1 The English proofreading of the thematic volume of the DTK was kindly financed by the Institute of History, Czech Academy of Sciences.

2 GERY CANAVAN, ERIC CARL LINK, *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction*, Cambridge 2018. Adam Roberts, *The history of Science Fiction*, London 2006. In Czech language: IVAN ADAMOVIČ, TOMÁŠ POSPISZYL, *Planeta Eden: svět zítřka v socialistickém Československu 1948–1978*, Řevnice 2010.

3 STEFAN GUTH, *One Future Only: The Soviet Union in the Age of the Scientific-Technical Revolution*, Journal of Modern European History 13/3 (2015), pp. 355–376. ELKE SEEFRIED, *Reconfiguring the Future? Politics and Time from the 1960s to the 1980s – Introduction*, Journal of Modern European History 13/3 (2015), pp. 306–316. GORDON L. ROCCA, *"A Second Party in Our Midst": The History of the Soviet Scientific Forecasting Association*, Social Studies of Science 11/2 (1981), pp. 199–247. PETR ROUBAL, *Plánování Prahy v 80–90. letech. Sebedestrukce urbanistické expertízy*, in Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu, (ed.) Michal Kopeček, Praha 2019.

4 PETER FITTING, *A Short History of Utopian Studies*, Science Fiction Studies 36/1 (2009), pp. 121–131. GEORGES MINOIS, *Histoire de l'avenir. Des prophètes à la prospective*, Paris 1996.

European post-1945 principal events, the collapse of Nazism, and the crisis/collapse of communism.[5] According to Schivelbusch, every society experiencing complex political defeat deals with it in certain ways to avoid social disintegration and further collapse. The society generally looks for an explanation of the defeat, searching for scapegoats, defining itself as the moral victor, learning from the factual victor, and developing certain rituals (commemoration, mourning, places of memory). Most importantly for us, according to Schivelbusch, societies also develop the idea of the dreamland, mainly in the form of golden times before the defeat or the lost territories, or the dreamland associated with the future revanche and victory.[6] Schivelbusch does not apply his concept to the fate of modern political ideologies and political movements, but exclusively to national cultures: post-1870s France, the U.S. South during the era of reconstruction, and the Weimar Republic. The following volume aims to show that the concept of "culture of defeat" can be applied to the two radical modern political movements: fascism/national socialism and Stalinism/communism. The collapses of these movements have in common with Schivelbusch's original concept that they were accompanied by the collapse of state structures: the Third Reich, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. In all cases, those who retain their trust in the original political concept (or in its modified form) developed a certain culture of defeat. In the following volume, we aim to show that some of those who considered various defeats (specifically the fall of the Nazi Reich in 1945, the break with Stalinism in 1956, and the end of Soviet communism) turned to plans for the radical future transformation of societies. The general tendency to turn from the pessimistic present to the positive future allowed the authors to keep at least some aspects of defeated ideologies. These positive futures generally have a global or at least pan-European scope. This is not only the case with the very concept of communism, which is universal, but also with the popularity of a unified Europe or even the world government in post-Nazi Germany, and with competing perceptions of post-Yugoslav Serbia being the victim of European liberalism and the embodiment of European Christian values or the former Yugoslavia being the predecessor of a future unified and socially progressive Europe.

To understand modern Central and Eastern European imaginings of the future, it is necessary to look briefly at general trends in the perception of the future during the 20th century in the public discourse, social sciences, and sci-fi.

5 WOLFGANG SCHIVELBUSCH, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, New York 2001.

6 Ibid., pp. 10–35.

Well-known positive expectations of the future, such as the 19th-century idea of the age of progress, were slowly replaced during the "fin de siècle" period by the fear of the future reflecting industrial or interstate conflicts (dystopias by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Jack London).[7] This was also reflected in the shift in social sciences from optimistic pictures of modernity by Comte or Spencer to less optimistic ones by Durkheim, Weber, Spengler, or Tönnies. The horrible experience of WWI further contributed to this in the sci-fi genre (e.g., Karel Čapek, Aldous Huxley).[8] Two main political events resulting from WWI, the Bolshevik revolution, and the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship were all intertwined with the plan to transform the society into a stable "perfect" form of either a social or racial utopia.[9] The future outcomes of Bolshevik and Nazi rule were also critically judged by dystopias (Zamjatin, Čapek, and Orwell)[10] or by social sciences (Popper, Mannheim).[11]

The defeat of Nazi Germany and the use of the nuclear bomb increased both the hopes and fears regarding the future.[12] The first attempt to establish forecasting as a scientific field (future studies) occurred in the USA at the time, but its results were only partially satisfying.[13] The idea of the United Nations as a promise of no more war contrasted with the upcoming Cold War expressed masterfully by Orwell in his novel *1984*. The communist threat remained a powerful narrative in Western popular culture and military planning until the 1980s,[14] while imagining a war against the USA was taboo in Soviet popular culture and public discourse. The fear of nuclear war and spread of totalitarianism was nevertheless accompanied by optimistic prophecies of a coming affluent society resulting from

7 JULES VERNE, *Les Cinq cents millions de la Bégum*, Paris 1879. HERBERT GEORGE WELLS, *Time Machine*, London 1895. JACK LONDON, *Iron Heel*, New York 1908.

8 KAREL ČAPEK, *Rossum's Universal Robots: kolektivní drama o vstupní komedii a třech aktech*, Praha 1920. ALDOUS HUXLEY, *Brave New World*, London 1932.

9 LUCIAN HÖLSCHER, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1999.

10 YEVGENY ZAMYATIN, *We*, Boston 1924. KAREL ČAPEK, *Válka s mloky*, Praha 1936. GEORGE ORWELL, *1984*, London 1948.

11 KARL MANNHEIM, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Bonn 1929. KARL POPPER, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London 1936.

12 JOACHIM RADKAU, *Geschichte der Zukunft. Prognosen, Visionen, Irrungen in Deutschland von 1945 bis heute*, München 2017.

13 Classical work on the field is OSSIP FLECHTHEIM, *History and Futurology*, Arn Glan 1966.

14 MATTHEW CONNELLY, *"General, I Have Fought Just as Many Nuclear Wars as You Have": Forecasts, Future Scenarios, and the Politics of Armageddon*, American Historical Review 117/5 (2012), pp. 1431–1460.

the economic boom (Fourastié, Galbraith);[15] however some warned of a future society of consumerist robot-like humans (Riesmann, Marcuse).[16] The 1945 victory of the Soviet Union and space exploration since the late 1950s resurrected once again the ideals of coming communism in Soviet propaganda and popular culture, including sci-fi, but they did not survive the era of Khrushchev. Since that time, Soviet doctrine entailed that "real socialism" which was supposed to be replaced by communism only in a very distant future. Subsequently, Soviet sci-fi started to contain a certain social criticism as a genre relatively secured from ideological pressures. Nevertheless, future forecasting also blossomed in state socialism, particularly among the technocrats and reform communists,[17] and it gained popularity especially in the reform era after the death of Brezhnev.[18] The ideas of environmental destruction started to penetrate both Western and Soviet social sciences (Club of Rome report)[19] since the late 1960s, and later it found its way into sci-fi. The era of techno-optimism nevertheless existed further at least until the 1990s in both the Soviet version of a "scientific-technical revolution" and in the Western concept of an information society or post-industrial society.[20] The neoliberal turn and the collapse of the Soviet bloc brought short-term liberal optimism (the end of history);[21] this was accompanied by the Eastern European narrative of economic convergence and democracy, which was expect-

15 JEAN FOURASTIÉ, *Les 40 000 heures*, Paris 1965. JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH, *The Affluent Society*, New York 1958

16 DAVID RIESMAN; NATHAN GLAZER; REUEL DENNEY, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, New York 1950. HERBERT MARCUSE, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, New York 1964.

17 MARTIN SCHULZE WESSEL, CHRISTIANNE BRENNER (edd.), *Zukunftsvorstellungen und staatliche Planung im Sozialismus: die Tschechoslowakei im ostmitteleuropäischen Kontext 1945–1989: Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 22. bis 25. November 2007*, München 2010.

18 EGLE RINDZEVICIUTE, *A Struggle for the Soviet Future: The Birth of Scientific Forecasting in the Soviet Union*, Slavic Review 75/1 (2016), pp. 52–76. S. GUTH, *One Future Only*.

19 MEADOWS, DONELLA H.; MEADOWS, DENNIS L.; RANDERS, JØRGEN; BEHRENS III, WILLIAM W., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, New York 1972.

20 RADOVAN RICHTA, Civilizace na rozcestí – společenské a lidské souvislosti vědecko-technické revoluce, Praha 1966. DANIEL BELL, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, New York 1973. ALVIN TOFFLER, *The Third Wawe*, New York 1980.

21 FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1992. Also PETER BERGER, *The Capitalist Revolution*, New York 1986.

ed to appear either quickly (Sachs)[22] or somewhat slowly (Dahrendorf).[23] Since the late 1990s, optimism, however, evaporated and was replaced by ideas of the inevitable clash of civilization[24] or environmental destruction.[25] Also, rising social inequalities both on the national and global level,[26] as well as the crisis of democracy, were seen as trends leading to a future dystopia.[27] Fear of the future rather than optimism prevails in the Western public discourse, social sciences, and sci-fi to this day. Also in Eastern and Central Europe, the neoliberal dream of Westernised and prosperous societies was replaced by the imagined pessimistic future of an economically stagnating region ruled by populists.[28] The hope for the future paradoxically exists among the extreme right, which sees Eastern and Central Europe as the guardian of traditional European values, like Christianity and the family, against Western neo-Marxism (see the text by Vesković in this volume). The collapse of official Soviet Marxism meant that there was no significant space for democratic socialist or environmentalist alternatives in post-socialist public discussions.[29]

The presented thematic issue is the result of the workshop *Imagining the future in Central and Eastern Europe*, organised at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in September 2020. The article by Enis Sulstarova deals with the future depicted in Albanian sci-fi from the 1980s, a topic virtually unknown in scholarly publications so far. Even though the communist party ruled Albania at that time, Albanian sci-fi showed certain traits of the perceived defeat: The communist revolution was defeated in the countries of its birth, the Soviet Union and China, and therefore its realization remains on the shoulders of Albania. This was as such hard to believe if we consider the small size and underdevelopment of the country, but the authors of sci-fi for kids were sticking

22 JEFFREY SACHS, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy*, New York 1994. PETER BERGER, *The Capitalist Revolution*, New York 1986.

23 RALF DAHRENDORF, *Der Wiederbeginn der Geschichte: vom Fall der Mauer zum Krieg im Irak; Reden und Aufsätze,* München 2004.

24 SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1996.

25 AL GORE, *Earth in the Balance: Forging a New Common Purpose*, Earthscan 1992.

26 For a critique of neoliberal globalization, most importantly see NAOMI KLEIN, *No Logo*, New York 1999. For a warning against rising economic inequalities, see THOMAS PIKETTY, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2014.

27 COLIN CROUCH, *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge 2005.

28 IVAN KRASTEV, STEPHEN HOLMES, *The Light that Failed: A Reckoning*, London 2019.

29 JAROSLAV FIALA, *Varovná proroctví Egona Bondyho*, in: Myšlení a tvorba Egona Bondyho, (ed.) Petr Kužel, Praha 2018.

to the idea, only demonstrating the desperate historical chances of Albanian communism. Albanian sci-fi taking the communist future for granted contrasted with late-Soviet sci-fi, which was generally not so optimistic and also saw different futures beyond the narrow dichotomy of communism-capitalism. Another striking difference was that Soviet or Czechoslovak sci-fi expected unified mankind to accompany future communism in case it appeared, while Albanian sci-fi articulated the continual existence of the Albanian nation during communism, which reflects the isolation of the country. Albanian sci-fi omitting all social and economic problems of a self-isolated country, and omitting the given geopolitical circumstances can thus be characterized as a culture of displacing an inevitable future defeat.

The article by Anastasia Mitrofanova deals with another unorthodox communist perspective on the future: post-1991 communist sci-fi written in Russian. As we know, the communist movement survived as a rather strong political force in the Russian Federation, but it is burdened by political defeat, it draws its legitimacy only from the soviet-nostalgia and social problems of post-1991 Russia, and it is doubtful if it will ever get a chance to transform Russian society again. Besides the well-known existence of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, combining Soviet nostalgia with nationalism, there are plenty of groups identifying with different shades of communism (Trotskyist, Stalinist, Maoist, Democratic Socialist, Nationalist, etc.). It is perhaps unsurprising that there is a circle of sci-fi writers and readers in the Russian communist movement that to this day numbers around two hundred thousand activists. The communist sci-fi scene is for sure marginal in contrast to the prevailing political leanings of sci-fi in Russia (conservative, nationalist). Surprisingly, it kept its historic optimism, and the culture of defeat does not dominate here; it appears only several times. The analysed works generally show a very firm belief about a communist future sometimes as if there was no defeat of the Soviet Union. Again, as in the case of Albanian sci-fi, the psychological mechanisms of displacing seem to be influential in the scene. Surprising is also the lack of dialogue between Western leftist sci-fi and contemporary Russian communist sci-fi writers as if the iron curtain further existed. What remains is the belief in the future which will bring the end of history in the form of an equalitarian and collectivist society. We can only speculate if this obvious lack of realism does not result from the inconclusiveness of any oppositional forces in Putin's Russia.

The article by Anna Elisabeth Keim brings us to the other side of the political spectrum and to another period in time, post-1945 Germany. It has in common with the first two articles the search for an ideal human order, here the idea of a world state. With Mitrofanova, it shares the context of the total defeat of

a political movement. It brings to the fore the idea of a future unification of mankind into a political unit which has a long tradition in the history of political ideas and repeatedly gained popularity in the aftermath of big conflicts with its promise of eternal peace. But it was only during and after the Second World War that an international movement aiming to put this idea into political reality appeared. The analysis then centres around the biography of one particularly important German proponent of this idea: photographer and journalist Joe J. Heydecker, who in 1946 initiated a group called Weltstaat-Liga (World State League). Heydecker, who had been interested in pacifist ideas of world unity since a young age, developed his ideas further in his diaries and manuscripts written during his time in the Wehrmacht. In his writings, he profiled himself as a political conservative sympathising with technocratic and corporate state ideas, which also mirrored his envisioning of a future world state. A stout anti-socialist, Heydecker had a vision of a radical individualist future world state in which neither classes nor "races" were the central figures of history. The idea of a world-state as something guarding Europe against communism was part of not only the German culture of defeat but also other Europeans who felt the fear of the mighty Soviet victor. Further, the analysis illustrates the influence of esoteric belief on Heydecker's activism for world unity and describes the emergence of the Weltstaat-Liga in the spatial and intellectual setting of the Nuremberg trials.

Similarly to Mitrofanova, the article by Lejla Vesković deals with the post-socialist era. It discusses the two imaginations of the European future in the background of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia from the point of view of two authors: conservative nationalist Austrian Peter Handke and progressive leftist Serb Saša Ilić. Their writings clearly belong to the culture of the defeat of Yugoslavia/Serbia; however, they omit the discussion of the communist movement. As Vesković shows, they offer two different explanations of Yugoslavia's breakup: The first one, written in the form of a travel report from mid-1990s Serbia (published in 1996), sees the breakup as the result of a conspiracy of liberal forces against the Yugoslav/Serbian state. The alleged systematic humiliation of Serbia during peace negotiations organized by Western powers anticipates the dark future of Europe, where all the heroic values are given up and where consumerism, multiculturalism, and political correctness prevail. Serbia, instead of being supported by European powers as the ante-murale of Christianity, is robbed and put on its knees. The second analysed novel, by Serbian writer Saša Ilić (published 2019), offers another narrative: it shares a certain nostalgia for Yugoslavia, but it sees it as in fact the European multicultural state destroyed by the brutal forces of nationalism. Ilić not only critically reflects on Serbian nationalism, but he also sees critically contemporary European capitalism, arguing for a renewal

of democratic communist/socialist ideals. The renaissance of these ideas would also mean a rehabilitation of the former multicultural ideal of Yugoslavia. He differs strongly from the contemporary Russophone communist writers analysed by Mitrofanova and can be placed in the tradition of the Western and Yugoslav antiauthoritarian left. From the concept of the Culture of Defeat, both authors share the nostalgia for Yugoslavia but blame for her breakup liberalism (Handke) or nationalism (Ilić). Concerning the future, Handke follows the tradition of Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*, while Ilić is more optimistic and hopes for the future renewal of socialist ideals both in ex-Yugoslavia and in Europe.

The common trait of the articles is a certain marginality of genres and political radicalism of analysed actors. From a marginal German post-1945 journalist, writers of children's novels in Albania, the country known colloquially as the Museum of Stalinism, to a contemporary Nobel Prize winner who marginalized himself in the eyes of the Western public due to his defence of the Milošević regime. Imagining the future in these situations generally reflects the search for hope in desperate situations, in which it is possible to react with optimism, pessimism, or a mixture of both. Two important points can be drawn from the studies: Most of the analysed authors were surprisingly optimistic concerning the future they wished for, and their stance understandably displaces doubts about their projects in a generally pessimistic situation – from, Heydecker's optimistic expectation of the future world-state, a belief in future communism by pre-1991 Albanian and post-1991 Russophone authors, to the democratic leftist transformation by Ilić writing in the traditions of the Yugoslav left. Among the analysed case, only the conservative Peter Handke sees the future of Europe in a clearly pessimistic way. Secondly, the answer to the crises is in all cases strongly rooted within global, European, and not primarily national contexts. Even self-isolated Albania saw the future of mankind in universal communism. We have a call for a European multicultural humanist alternative to ethnic cleansing and capitalism, the ideal of communism without borders and nations, and we have the European world-state movement or Serbia fighting for a Europe endangered by liberalism. Gauging from the authors and works analysed above, it seems the radical visions of the future were lively in the period after 1945 and remain so to this day.