Introduction

There are two main aims of this book. One is to provide the reader with *descriptive* insights into the 1989 revolutions and the subsequent process of change, and to do this in a more tangible manner than has been usual in the analyses of post-communism. For this purpose, a specific story, a narrative based on interviews with students and young intellectuals in the Czech Republic, Eastern Germany and Estonia will be constructed in the course of the study. The second is to create and develop *conceptual* tools with which to analyse and better comprehend the social and political developments in Eastern Europe over the first post-communist decade and, perhaps, even in the future. The interest of knowledge is thus primarily heuristic: whatever wishes one might have for this work, if it contributes to a better historical understanding of this profound societal change, it has fulfilled its most essential task.

There is naturally a more precise point of departure than these general aims. According to a widely held view, the revolutions of 1989 were first and foremost a result of people's needs to get rid of the lamentable communist rule: a rotten, corrupt and inefficient system, saturated with a double standard of morality and hopelessly lagging behind the West. This study does not in itself challenge this view – evidence provided in the ensuing chapters in many respects supports it. However, it does suggest that this view may have become too dominant, and that, due to this, Eastern Europe's revolutions and the developments thereafter have too often been interpreted from the perspective of the events that had already been, not of those that were expected to come, of the future possibilities that 'ordinary' people awaited when they took to the streets. In other words, the fact that the events of 1989 were not merely a manifestation of the old system's impossibility, but also an expression of people's dreams of a new kind of society, of their hopes of achieving true political and legal rights, material welfare and individual freedom, of their desire for a better life, has been overlooked, at least in scholarly debates. In any event, these hopes have been seen too narrowly – say, as a desire to attain Western material living standards or as a quest for membership in the EU (European Union) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation).

In what follows, these dreams and aspirations are given a common, and undoubtedly controversial, name: utopia. Hence, this is an analysis

of the utopia that was to be achieved with the 1989 revolutions, the development of this utopia in the 1990s, its most striking and important features and its ability to deceive and lead to disappointments. In the light of this analysis – composed of five main themes, namely revolution as such, ambivalence, disillusionment, individualism and collective identity – the concluding chapter will pose the question of the nature and possibilities of politics in today's Eastern Europe. The paramount argument is thus that in order to understand politics in Eastern Europe, we have to take into consideration the 'utopian aspect' of the revolutionary processes. Utopia, then, is to be seen as an overall perspective, not as a concept that should be accurately defined in itself.[1]

Background

This book naturally has its own prehistory, a history that is worth reviewing, for it reveals a number of theoretical, methodological and etymological premises of the coming analysis. As a Finn, as a citizen of a country that always bordered the 'East', I sensed enthusiastically the signs of change from the mid-1980s – to be precise, since Mikhail Gorbachev was crowned in Moscow in March 1985. In 1989, as a young political science student, I was no less excited to see how the communist regimes were collapsing one after the other. In March of the next year I made my first acquaintance with what was still Czechoslovakia, with the enthusiasm that prevailed in the country during the first months of the new era. Enthusiasm that, as I realised, I wanted to understand better.

   In 1993, then, while I was preparing my master's thesis, I spent two months in Prague. Here I designed the first model of the questionnaire for the interviews that compose the primary empirical material of this study, and conducted the first set of interviews, with twelve ordinary Prague university students. At that time I did not know precisely what particular aspect of the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution – or the end of communism in general – interested me most. I did know, however, that it was the perspective of my generation and educational group, the perspective of people like myself, that I wanted to capture. This was also intellectually defendable: students had been the main torchbearers of the glorious events in Prague in November 1989. What was probably even more important was that, as it seemed to me, Western political and social scientists had ignored the views of these ordinary revolutionaries in their analyses. Most books and articles written about the revolutions in Eastern Europe had precious little to say about the interpretations of those who had lived through these events; about the mood

of the lay people; about the numerous stories, narratives and myths that had come into existence – and that, at the end of the day, were to compose the 'truth' of the revolutions.

In view of this critical point of departure, the research process proved successful: each of my interviewees displayed much more of the post-communist realities than I had ever expected, and definitely more than most social scientific analyses I had read. Moreover, although the number of interviewees was small, the story they conveyed to me was surprisingly many-sided and multilayered – yet still somehow clear. Several important themes, such as the temporal, spatial and ideological aspects inherent in the revolutions, were crystalised for me through their story. It was thus easy to rely on interviews as the basic method-ological approach to my work in Eastern Germany and Estonia a couple of years later.

These latter two countries came to the fore as I decided to include a comparative perspective into my analysis of post-communism. As it still seemed fruitful to concentrate on university students' and young intellectuals' views – that is, to review the revolutionary change through the eyes of one generation and social group, generally a highly reflexive and active group – a country-level comparison rather than, say, a comparison between different social classes, appeared as the natural option. That the choice fell on Eastern Germany and Estonia had one simple reason: they are sufficiently different from the Czech Republic, which is, as it were, a 'typical' representative of Central Europe. Due to unification, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) is of course an odd case among the post-communist countries; and Estonia, because of its long years of Soviet repression and its regained independence, represents another distinct group among these countries. It was hoped that three countries would create an illusion of three-dimensionality.

Whilst conducting the next set of interviews – again with twelve university students – in Berlin in the spring of 1996, I was naturally much better aware of what to look for. Hence, some of the important themes explored in the ensuing chapters, such as national identity, scepticism and individualism, were already included in the question-naire, although its basic structure remained the same. And when I moved to Estonia in August 1997, and conducted the twelve interviews there, even the theme of 'utopia' had become clear to me. But the central critical argument remained the same throughout these years, and across the three countries. All too often social and particularly political scientists have analysed the developments of post-communism from an eagle's perspective, using methodological and theoretical packages

designed in entirely different circumstances. All too seldom have they humbly listened to the views of the people of Eastern Europe.[2]

The consequences of the above argument for the nature of the analysis have been profound, and not only in determining the choice of method and the target group of students and young intellectuals. First of all, the study has sought to be as inductive as possible, to let the essential points spring from the empirical materials. To maximise this, the themes of the interviews were also formulated as openly as possible (see appendices). Secondly, the study operates with a significant number of concepts, some of them large in their scope, others smaller, but what is important is that these concepts are not always defined in a clear-cut manner. A certain amount of conceptual openness is essential in order to grasp the vagueness of human opinions and attitudes, especially in the case of such a complex event as the end of communism.

The third point is methodologically and epistemologically perhaps the most essential, and one that hardly any analysis of human societies can bypass. It concerns the relations between the micro and macro levels of historical understanding: to what extent can we understand macro-level changes through micro-level events and experiences, and vice versa? In the framework of this study, what is the explanatory value of a fragmentary idea that comes up in the course of just one interview with a randomly selected student? The simple answer is that the value is fairly small indeed, but that it increases the better the idea is contextualised; that is, the better it is related to other interviewees' ideas or other empirical materials, be they micro- or macro-level sources. In this sense, contextualising the interviews is the basic method, as well as goal, of this study. Conversely, and this is possibly even more important, it is only in relation to the interviews that the context becomes meaningful; it truly becomes a frame into which we can set the small pieces of experience and information we constantly acquire, and with the help of which we understand the world. One could say that the study seeks to contextualise the context with pieces of fragmentary information.

Closely connected to this argument is the fact that as the change in Eastern Europe has been extremely profound and multifaceted, even the greatest macro-sociological analysis is doomed to be too small – horizontally not sufficiently embracing. By using a limited number of interviews conducted with ordinary people, one can no doubt only obtain fragmentary knowledge, but at least this way one is able to internalise and comprehend that knowledge properly – to be vertically embracing.

This also implies that the study, the story of the Eastern European revolution it aims to tell, is composed of a number of different levels or

surfaces. In the most general sense, there are only two surfaces – the subjective and the objective, the interviews and the scholarly debate and analysis. More specifically, the study consists of a synthesis of the individual stories of the interviewees; of the fates of three different countries facing the challenge of post-communism; of a number of professional interpretations of these events; and of what this author has read, learnt and probably also understood about the end of communism. What is important is that all these levels are in constant dialogue with each other. To use a musical metaphor, throughout the work different levels, elements and pieces of information are contrasted with each other in a manner comparable to that of different voices in polyphonous choral music; each voice sings an independent melody and no voice is more important than the others.[3]

From what has been said above, it should be obvious that this study does not represent any specific field within the social sciences; instead, it is thoroughly interdisciplinary in nature. Traces of sociology, philosophy, history, anthropology and political science feature in it. It is thus simply a work of social thought, although, as will be seen, its final question appears particularly relevant for political scientists.

The Rejection of Utopia

The concept of utopia is so important for the coming analysis that, although it will be more thoroughly explored in chapter 2, a few central points must be raised here.

Utopia in this study is to be seen as a heuristic device. This means, above all, that the concept is never an end in itself; utopia only offers a general perspective that links the different themes of the study together. Moreover, the following chapters do not seek to judge whether this or that phenomenon really is utopian, or how utopian a phenomenon is, but they rather pose the question of how aspects of utopia or utopianism manifest themselves in this phenomenon. For example, if one claimed that in the post-communist era people are fed up with all political ideologies and just want to be left alone so that they can earn a fortune, one cannot really say whether this is a profoundly utopian or anti-utopian attitude. But it is definitely worthwhile to raise this question, to think about it through the lenses of utopia. It is also important to note that utopia is in the here and now of any actual social constellation; the West and its material prosperity 'existed' in the East – as a dream. In other words, 'utopia' (with the lower case initial) here does not refer to a no-place or to a fixed social model, to a timeless social perfection.

The reader may now wonder why the concept of utopia rather than, say, dream or hope should be used at all? Three reasons for this are worth mentioning. First of all, the rapid and radical nature of Eastern Europe's change speaks in favour of utopia: dreams or hopes would not necessarily capture the profoundness of this change. By way of example, had someone claimed in the mid-1980s that the former communist countries would be knocking at the door of the EU in a few years time, one would have been considered a hopeless utopian – not a dreamer – perhaps comparable to those who were already forecasting Russia's future as a socialist country around the turn of the twentieth century. Utopia thus seems to denote a more profound phenomenon than dream or hope, although, and as will be seen in chapter 2, there is no doubt that dreams and hopes are aspects of humans' utopian consciousness.

Secondly, socialism (or communism) was, throughout its existence, the most important societal utopia in many corners of the world. It was the only utopian counter-culture to the capitalist class society (cf. Bauman 1976). Hence, once socialism as an enticing alternative has withered away, it appears particularly relevant to ask what kind of utopias are left. One also has to bear in mind that people in Eastern Europe were raised in the socialist belief that society should have a utopia, a clearly defined future goal. Indeed, even in 1989 a significant number of people truly believed in the need of a utopia, or even in the utopia of communism. What happens when this belief no longer holds true?[4]

Thirdly, the notion of utopia connects this study to the post-communist social science debates more firmly than do the 'milder' terms. As already stated, this connection is critical in nature: the existence of utopia has largely been rejected in scholarly literature, which is, the study argues, a serious mistake. This proposition needs to be discussed at some length.

After 1989, the rejection-of-utopia thesis was advanced on two main levels. On a very general level, utopia was one of those things that was declared dead in the popular intellectual enterprise that could be called 'the prophesying of ends'. The most famous of these prophecies was the so-called 'end of history': the fall of communism was the final confirmation of the superiority of Western liberal democracy and capitalism; as a consequence, we now live in a state which will be eternally constant, particularly due to the fact that economic interests in liberal-democratic states work against the making of war. But history was far from the only thing which was considered to have ended. Provoked by the realisation that real socialism was experiencing its final demise, people began to declare many things, for example emotions, morality and equality – things that basically have nothing to do with socialism or

even politics – to be finished or matters of the past. Even Lyotard's original definition of postmodernity as the era after meta-narratives was misinterpreted: Lyotard's (1979) idea was to celebrate the birth of a world of small narratives rather than to lament the end of the grand ones. But for some reason, the first post-communist decade did not produce dozens of books entitled 'The birth of this and that' – or at least these books were not at the centre of societal debates.[5]

Be that as it may, the end of utopia, the end of history, the end of ideology, and even the end of politics, have often been seen as different sides of one and the same phenomenon. In the following extract, from an article called *Europe after Utopianism*, the late French historian François Furet manages to compress much of what is characteristic of this mode of thinking:

> Another consequence of the collapse of communism is that henceforth we must live in a closed political universe, with nothing beyond the horizon. This is something completely new, considering that for the last two hundred years the ideas and passions of European politics have been unceasingly fuelled by radical critiques of capitalism and liberal democracy made in the name of a more organized or more fraternal society – a utopian vision manifested on the right in a nostalgia for hierarchies, and on the left in the hope of socialism. Today, both are dead and we are condemned to live in the world in which we currently find ourselves.
>
> But will we know how to live in that world? This question is overlaid by another, more general one: Can modern democracy survive without revolutionary utopia, that is to say, without its own negation? (Furet 1995: 80–81)

Two points in this passage deserve special attention. First, there is an underlying assumption that the world is somehow essentially dialectical, that any societal formation has somehow to produce its own negation or antithesis, that utopia would not exist without anti-utopia. Even democracy is understood, or rather, profoundly misunderstood, in terms of this dialectics. But one of the important consequences of the year 1989 was that it is no longer necessary to think in dialectical terms. This is especially true with respect to democracy. In today's (Eastern) Europe, the nature of democracy is that of a *conditio sine qua non*. Democracy is perceived as fundamentally good; there are no real alternatives. Perhaps the question is of a generational problem: the generations that grew up and lived in a bipolar world cannot simply forget the past, the attractive simplicity of the dialectical order.

Secondly, phrases such as 'closed political universe' and 'condemned to this world' seem to indicate that with the collapse of communism we reached an essentially closed world. This, the present author would

argue, is another misinterpretation of the era in which we now live. It does not give any role for the category of the future; the *potentia* of future *as such* is not recognized. The 1989 revolutions were clear demonstrations of this *potentia*: the creation of a future that was open in a new way was an extremely important reason for, and result of, the fall of communism. As we will see in chapter 2, an open future can be a utopia.

It would be tempting to continue this discussion, worthy of an independent study in itself, but for reasons of space let us turn to the second main level on which utopia has been rejected, namely the actual events of 1989. In the numerous interpretations of them, at least in those published in the early stages of the transformation, the verdict was indeed hostile towards utopia. Above all, most of these interpretations claimed that the revolutions did not produce anything new in terms of societal ideas or goals – the Eastern European countries simply wanted to return to the path that had been cut off some fifty years earlier. Even many liberal scholars, who undoubtedly believe that societal development is essentially free and undetermined, usually maintained that there was nothing truly new that entered societal fora as the Iron Curtain ceased to exist. Admittedly, this might indeed have been the case if seen from a fairly narrow perspective: it is hard to claim that the most important demands of the revolutionaries, that is, the call for human rights, democracy and freedom, would have brought about a substantially new model of organising human societies. In this respect, as Jeffrey Isaac (1996: 295) put it, the revolutions can simply be interpreted as 'a revival of a political project inaugurated by the framers of the United States Constitution'. (Cf., for example, Dahrendorf 1990; Garton Ash 1990.)

In the writings of many Western left-oriented intellectuals the mood was very much the same. For example, Jürgen Habermas, in his *Nachholende Revolution*, spoke about 'den fast vollständigen Mangel an innovativen, zukunftsweisenden ideen'.[6] Claus Offe was even more radical in his wording when he claimed:

> This upheaval is a revolution without a historical model and revolution without a revolutionary theory. Its most conspicuous distinguishing characteristic is indeed the lack of any elaborated theoretical assumptions and normative arguments addressing the questions who is to carry out which actions under which circumstances and with what aims, which dilemmas are to be expected along the road, and how the new synthesis of a postrevolutionary order ought to be constituted and what meaning should be assigned to the notion of progress. (Offe 1991: 866)[7]

The emphasis on the return to the old, and on the absence of the new, implied in the above quotations, does not mean, however, that the

utopian aspects of the 1989 revolutions have been completely neglected in scholarly interpretations. The two most important of these utopian aspects, closely connected to one another, were no doubt liberalism and consumption. For example, Jerzy Szacki wrote in 1990 that 'liberalism appears to Eastern Europe as a utopia, as a vision of the good society most glaringly opposed to the realities of the communist system'.[8] As for consumption, Western intellectuals – and some Eastern as well – tended to see it merely as an anti-utopia. John Kenneth Galbraith (1990: 3), for one, talked about a simplistic 'banana ideology' that Eastern Europe assumed in the course of the 1980s and shortly after the revolutions. It was based on a bipolar world where capitalism was nirvana.

In addition to consumption and liberalism, in many an analysis of post-communism the resurgence of nationalism – in so far as it has had a clearly defined goal, for example the establishment of a mono-ethnic state – has often featured as a true (political) utopia. As already noted, one might also consider the striving for membership in the EU and NATO in terms of utopia. Furthermore, the technological and environmental aspirations and dreams that people had also deserve to be mentioned in conjunction with the notion of utopia. The technological utopia, or rather the information society, was in many ways crucial for provoking the change in Eastern Europe: people wanted to achieve the technological level and possibilities of the West as soon as possible. In many countries the catastrophic situation of the environment was one of the reasons behind the revolutionary awakening – in Estonia, for example, it was even decisive.

But in spite of these utopian aspects, when the 'denial of the new' coincided with the general 'end of utopia' thesis, the result was a peculiar closure of social and societal horizons – at least in the minds of Western commentators; a closure implies that there is no utopia. This perception of pessimism was further enhanced by the fact that after the revolutionary euphoria, people's huge expectations came tumbling down as the catastrophic situation of their countries and the difficulty of the change became apparent. Hence, the renowned German sociologist Wolf Lepenies could claim, only two years after the revolution, that 'nobody speaks about utopia any more'.[9] The dominance of this scholarly interpretation hardly changed in the latter part of the 1990s or in the early 2000s.

In view of all this, the critical argument of this study is that in most analyses of post-communism the concept of utopia and its role and nature have been far too narrowly understood, or even misplaced. The possibility of seeing utopia in terms of individuality, plurality and 'everydayness' has not been considered. However, if it is true that utopia

'gives birth to new ideas far removed from everyday life' (Simečka 1984: 175; cf. the section 'The plurality of utopia' in chapter 2) but it is still in the here and now of this everyday, then the logic prevalent in most of the analyses mentioned above, that is, no fixed social models, therefore no utopia, is not tenable. Even ordinary life, life without a Utopia, can be seen from a utopian perspective. The latter point can be especially relevant in the Eastern part of the European continent that has, as is well known, in the course of history lived through so many cruel, non-ordinary times – a point that the eminent Polish writer and former dissident Adam Michnik has made strikingly clear:

> Somewhat timidly, I think of certain distinguished politicians of the ex-communist opposition, people of the Church, and people of the post-communist formation, who were once divided by everything and are still divided by many things today. But they nevertheless share a certain perspective on reality: they all look to the future. In the face of the ominous temptations of the contemporary world, in the face of class, ethnic, and religious wars and hatreds, those people are proposing a conversation about an ordinary Poland in an ordinary Europe.
>
> This project is free of the utopianism that has usually accompanied great turning points. Yet this very project has been the utopian dream of several generations of Poles. (Michnik 1999: 250)

Another critical argument derives from the fact that many political scientists have understood the political nature of the revolutionary developments in too narrow a manner, that is, from the perspective of what could be called official or high politics. Consequently, the socio-cultural level of change and the individual have been somehow forgotten, even though, arguably, politics in the era of ever higher reflexive capacities evolves more and more from this level, from below. Utopia has thus also been perceived within this narrow framework. However, it will be argued in the following pages that what may appear as an ideological or utopian vacuum at the level of official politics may be full of utopias, even collective ones, at the level of individuals.

Last but not least, one could simply criticise the rejection-of-utopia thesis on the grounds that concrete utopias do exist in post-communist literature. Perhaps the most famous of these originates from Václav Havel's pen. One of the essays in his *Summer Meditations* is called 'Beyond the Shock of Freedom'; it is a beautiful dream of the future of Czechoslovakia. The following extract is from the beginning of it:

> In the first place, I hope, the atmosphere of our lives will change. The shock of freedom, expressed through frustration, paralysis, and spite, will have

gradually dissipated from society. Citizens will be more confident and proud, and will share a feeling of co-responsibility for public affairs. They will believe that it makes sense to live in this country.

Political life will have become more harmonious. We will have two large parties with their own traditions, their own intellectual potential, clear programs, and their own grass-roots support. They will be led by a new generation of young well-educated politicians whose outlook has not been distorted by the era of totalitarianism. And of course there will be several smaller parties as well.

Our constitutional and political system will have been created and tested. It will have a set of established, gentlemanly, unbendable rules. The legislative bodies will work calmly, with deliberation and objectivity. The executive branch of government and the civil service will be inconspicuous and efficient. The judiciary will be independent and will enjoy popular trust, and there will be an ample supply of new judges. (Havel 1992: 102)

In its beauty this passage hardly calls for any comments. But perhaps its idealistic, hopeful tone is worth bearing in mind in the course of reading this book.[10]

Empirical Sources and Narrativity

As already explained, the central empirical data of this study consists of the interviews conducted among randomly chosen university students in Prague (spring 1993) and East Berlin (spring 1996), and among university-educated young people in Tartu and Tallinn, Estonia (autumn 1997). There are thirty-six interviews altogether, twelve from each country. The interviewees, nineteen females and seventeen males, were found with a modified snowball method so that they represented as many educational fields as possible. They were born between 1964 and 1973, which means that most of them had already been university students as the communist system fell; in any case they had been old enough to remember clearly the time of the previous regime. Methodologically, the interviews were semistructured theme interviews, lasting from one hour to over two hours. They were conducted in the mother tongue of the interviewee, except for one in Estonia and seven in the Czech Republic that were conducted in English, and one Czech interview that was conducted in Finnish; they were taped and transcribed.

The interview material was complemented by eighteen essays written by Czech students and young intellectuals (born 1965–76) in the winter of 1998. The essayists were given five general themes relevant to the post-communist developments, about which they were

asked to write some five pages. In the course of the analysis these essays will be used very much in the same manner as the interviews; the plural form 'interviewees' will also refer to the essayists. The interviewees, essays, method of analysis and questionnaires are more thoroughly explored in the appendices.

The interviews have four basic roles in the analysis. First of all, and most obviously, they have revealed, and made it possible to understand, aspects of the Eastern European reality that the author, an outsider, may otherwise have overlooked or not noticed at all. Secondly, they focus the study onto one group of people, the young and the educated, a central group for the future of these countries.[11] There is thus a clear generational perspective in the analysis. It is worth bearing in mind that the interviewees' young age may have shaped their interpretations in a peculiar way: what was new or surprising for the interviewees might not have been that new for older generations; every generation has to build up its own reality. In this sense, the transition process has simply added an extra dimension to these young people's efforts to construct their own world view.

Thirdly, the interviews, or rather the passages from them, function as illustrations of prevailing ideas in society. They show that the ideas that are presented in this study are not mere intellectual constructions but, essentialist as it may sound, part of the 'real world' as well. As the interviews were conducted and the essays written several years after the actual revolutions, it is obvious that this 'real world' has a strong historical dimension – the question is of people's memories, of their retrospective interpretations, of the 'remains' of the revolutions, as it were.[12] It is also noteworthy that while some of the passages may appear hopelessly trivial or even naive, even this can unveil something about the societies being studied. One could also see the passages as juridical testimonies: one person's statement is usually insufficient but when further evidence is provided, the testimony's value increases.

Last but by no means least, the interviews bring the level of narrativity into the analysis. Each interview is to be seen as a small narrative about the revolutionary process, and these small narratives are arranged into a larger one in the course of the study. Let us therefore raise a few points concerning narrativity, albeit without going into the details of this broad area of theory.

The most simple definition of a narrative is that of a 'story' but it is not merely a story. A narrative is, above all, a dialogue or a relation between the narrator and the reader or listener, or even the outside 'world'. One cannot understand the concept of narrative without taking into consideration the personality of the participants in the dialogue and the overall context in which it is being produced. This also implies

that the narrative is created for a specific purpose: it has a function. This function can be a purely social one as, say, in the case of a story told at a dinner table. Or it can be an explanatory one: a narrative binds things together and explains the relations between different social elements – irrespective of whether these elements actually have a relation or not. Hence, a narrative need not be coherent; in fact, it usually contains discontinuities, breaks and ruptures, and its chronological order may be incorrect. A narrative is thus essentially fragmentary – it resembles more of a slide show than a film. All in all, a narrative is active, unstable and changing, and it attains its meaning only through the social and historical context in which it is born. While a narrative is a likelihood rather than the truth, a social science study based on narrativity seeks to open up new perspectives and possibilities for seeing the world rather than to provide ready-made, fixed answers.[13]

Arguably there are two elementary ways of looking at or under-standing human society: the structural and the narrative-based. However, the authors of the mountain of scholarly books and articles that have been written on the changes in Eastern Europe have all too seldom tried to think of or analyse these changes from the perspective of a narrative, as stories or tales living *inside* these societies. Even traditional histories (as opposed to social science essays) have usually aimed to transform the narratives found in the primary sources into a structure, without letting the level of narrative live. In contrast, the point of departure for the present study is provided by insiders' narratives, by the ideas taped in the course of the interviews. These ideas are then analysed thematically and systematically – structurally – but always bearing in mind that the interviews have a value per se, the value of narrativity that the reader must appreciate.

Two main arguments support the emphasis on narrativity in this study. Most importantly, Eastern Europeans themselves think of the revolution and the change thereafter as a narrative. It is a story for them, a memory in a narrative form, in many cases one of the most important stories of their lives, especially for the young whose horizons of expectation were just about to open up when the revolutions occurred. People's analyses of the change are predominantly not about institutions or other structures of society. The narrative of change thus has a clear function in these societies: it explains where people came from, where they have arrived at, and where they are possibly going to.

The second argument emerges from the fact that narrative knowledge had a very special role in communist Eastern Europe: narratives that were created and lived on in small circles, in niches, actively opposed to the system. For example, as there was no non-communist historiography, the narratives told by parents and grandparents to their

children and grandchildren preserved the national histories of these countries. The Western world, too, given the absence of precise knowledge about it, was essentially a narrative. When the post-communist era arrived, the new narratives were based on these old ones.

It has already been noted that the most important reason for choosing Estonia, Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic is that these three countries represent different types of post-communist societies. It is also worth bearing in mind, however, that these countries also display a number of similarities. First, all three experienced a relatively harsh and orthodox communist regime compared with some other communist countries. The East German and Czechoslovak leaders, moreover, resisted any changes until the very last moments. Also, all three countries have managed relatively well since the revolutions, at least in economic terms (apart from, perhaps, the issue of unemployment in the *Neue Bundesländer*). In this sense these three cases are very positive – the results might look different in Romania, not to speak of Russia, and the cases of Bosnia or Kosovo would require entirely different concepts. Culturally Eastern Germany, the Czech Republic and Estonia also have a lot in common. All three have always been influenced by Protestantism and German culture. Estonia still had an influential German minority when it became independent in 1918, and the story of the Sudeten Germans does not need introduction. The tradition of Central European culture is, of course, also important for all three (see, for example, Kundera 1984; Schöpflin and Wood 1989). Last but not least, all three have changed their state status after the revolution. This fact has, presumably, added a further reflexive dimension to the way people have contemplated the change.

The Structure of the Study

As already mentioned, five themes – revolution as such, ambivalence, disillusionment, individualism, and collective identity – have emerged, first and foremost through the interviewees' accounts, as the most important parameters for making sense of post-communist societies and post-communist politics in particular. These are also the themes of chapters 2 through 6. Before these, however, chapter 1 creates a historical narrative of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe, and particularly in Estonia, Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 form a fairly concise block, also chronologically. In chapter 2, 'Revolution as a Utopia', the starting point is that the 1989 revolutions as such were a utopia, a completely unexpected one. Above

all these revolutions revealed new forms of freedom and opened up a new kind of future for the people of these countries. What is also important is that the utopia of revolution by no means ceased to exist during the 1990s; the memory of the revolution still has a great influence in the way politics is understood in Eastern Europe. The first section of the chapter outlines the most important theoretical implications of the notion of utopia.

After the communist regimes had fallen, people soon realised that they could not rid themselves of old habits, manners and traditions overnight: the old was bound to exist along with the new. In chapter 3, this peculiar stage between the old and the new is analysed through the concept of post-revolutionary ambivalence. What has been interesting is that, although people gradually learned the tricks of the new world and forgot the past, some sort of ambivalence still seemed to remain. This latter form of ambivalence will be called postmodern ambivalence and it refers to the stage when people have clearly internalised the instability and profound complexity of the new system, the system they had been dreaming of. Chapter 3 is thus called 'Utopia Not Yet Fulfilled: Ambivalence after the Revolutions'.

For some people it proved impossible to learn to cope with post-communist conditions, with the post-communist ambivalence. The dreams and hopes they had right after the revolutions were not fulfilled: they became unemployed and their social security networks were destroyed; backwardness in comparison to the West appeared much more profound than expected; and the change seemed to be only superficial – those who had held all power in the old system now easily transformed their power into the world of business. Many people thus became disillusioned and disappointed, atomised and alienated. Even the winners of the new era have thus interpreted negatively at least some aspects of the change. Hence the title of chapter 4: 'Utopia Not Fulfilled: Disillusionment'.

The final two themes (parameters) could also be seen as sub-themes of the first one – they were already present at the time of the revolution. Yet they remained on the agenda throughout the 1990s, and will continue to be relevant for a long time. Probably the most important characteristic of today's Eastern Europe is rising individualism. Hence, the starting point of chapter 5, 'Individualism as a Utopia', is that communism was essentially coerced collectivism, and thus had a negative impact on people's ability to take initiatives and be reflexive; in contrast, the new era offers new possibilities for individual choices and lifestyles. But adapting to this new individualism, to this new relationship to oneself, has not been an easy matter. It may easily lead to egoism and atomisation and turn people away from politics. The analysis in the

chapter is based on the distinction between three components of individualism: self-direction, self-development and self-expression.

   Given the centrality of individualism in post-communist circumstances, one has to ask what the fate of collective identities has been. Chapter 6, 'Collective Utopias: From National Independence to Europe', has as its point of departure the fact that the late 1980s was a time of national awakening: national histories were reborn or recreated and national flags reappeared. But the role of the nation has presumably changed as its independent existence has become more and more self-evident. Along with this national awakening, the slogan 'Back to Europe' was frequently shouted on the streets of revolution. Indeed, it is probably this idea of 'coming back to Europe' that has changed people's attitudes towards their own nation more than anything else. The emphasis in chapter 6 will be on the Estonian case, which offers a fascinating, almost paradoxical, mixture of strong national values and an equally strong striving towards Europe – Europe meaning the West as opposed to the East.

   In the concluding chapter 'Politics between Utopia and Disillusionment', the five parameters introduced above are synthesised into a general analysis of the conditions of politics in post-communist Eastern Europe. In other words, the new freedoms and an open future, the struggle between the new and the old, the disappointments in the course of the transformation, and the goals people have had on individual and collective levels provide a framework for understanding the nature of politics in post-1989 Eastern Europe. One question of specific importance emerges: what is the sense, the role, of politics, in the era after communism, especially given that people do not seem to be interested in it, if they are completely indifferent towards it, if they even despise it? It is worth noting here that three different concepts of politics will be used in the study: official politics, that is, the politics of parties and parliaments; identity politics, that is, questions that pertain to people's identity as members of a community or a society; and politics as such, that is, the ideal of politics where every opinion is heard and elaborated, and where every person is allowed freely to express his or her views (Lagerspetz and Vogt 1998).

Concluding Remarks

The unexpected collapse of communism from 1987 to 1991, and the process of change in Eastern Europe thereafter is probably the most fascinating political process of our time. Part of its fascination derives

from the fact that it still appears so profoundly mysterious. All its secrets have by no means yet been analysed, interpreted or understood, despite numerous attempts. Instead, it constantly seems to escape beyond the horizon of its interpreter – perhaps because the process itself has not come to an end.

It has been particularly difficult to understand the changes in the realm of politics. On the one hand, official politics has been very turbulent in most of these countries: party structures and government coalitions have kept on changing. On the other hand, from the point of view of sub-politics, the situation has been just as problematic: it has been difficult to follow the rapid changes on the socio-cultural level, while people's fates in the new conditions have varied so greatly. This study aims, for its part, to fill these gaps in our knowledge – although we who grew up in the 'West', will probably never understand exactly the kind of change experienced by the people in the 'East'. As Rein, one of the Estonian interviewees, said:

> **Rein**: I don't know if it's true but it's still interesting to live in such a country where you have hardships, because it's not the kind of lethargic, stable thing, but you really live in an interesting country and in an interesting era. On the other hand, I don't think it's that important – maybe living in Finland, living in a stable country would have been better but sometimes I try to insist to myself that, well … I have experienced something: transition from communism to capitalism, that's an interesting thing, that's an experience for the whole life that people who have only lived in capitalism may never understand.

Finally, it must be noted that the question in the end is not only about the Czech Republic, Eastern Germany or Estonia, not even about Eastern Europe and Eastern European politics, although many themes and logical chains of events raised in the course of the study are applicable to other former communist countries as well. The reunification of Europe has created a new perception of the social and political reality which pervades all corners of the continent, a perception that we may not yet understand. Politics in particular has changed its nature. In principle it should no longer be possible to formulate politics on the basis of the essential dichotomy between 'we' and 'they'. Yet we still do not know how to move from the former era of strictly 'exclusive' politics to the present era of 'inclusive' politics, whatever the latter may mean. Understanding Eastern Europe's political reality, understanding the views of the young generation of Eastern Europeans in the midst of profound societal change, may make this move a little bit easier.