

by **Kristian Petrov**
illustrations **Ragni Svensson**

THE CONCEPT OF TRANSITION IN TRANSITION

Comparing the postcommunist use of the concept of transition with that found in Soviet ideology

The fall of the Soviet Union (USSR) also spelled the virtual death of Sovietology – the Cold War era area study of Soviet-style societies and politics.¹ If Sovietologists were not to throw in the towel, it would seem they had to face the choice of either refocusing on the few remains of communism outside Europe or continuing to apply their older theories to the new realities emerging within the post-Soviet bloc.² However, some Sovietologists, notably of a younger generation, identified a third option. This involved contributing to what within the social sciences at the time was evolving as a new interdisciplinary research field, concerned with countries defined to be in a state of economic, political, legal, and social “transition”. By assimilating a new paradigm, one could renew one’s position within the academic infrastructure in which new journals, conferences, textbooks, curricula, and research centers started to capitalize on “transition” – the new catchword of the day.³ The “Kremlinology” characteristic of much of traditional Sovietology, in which one had tended to compensate for the scarcity of data by extensive theorizing, often with a predilection for retrospective and “totalitarian” perspectives, was thus exchanged for explanatory models of a more empiricist kind, some of them having been applied to post-authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America

some fifteen years earlier.⁴

The lion’s share of the new “transitologists” was not, however, made up of reforming ex-Sovietologists, but more so of new scholars who did not, like the previous area specialists, necessarily have a background as experts on communism, the former Eastern Bloc, or Slavonic languages, but rather were included by being comparativists in a more general sense.⁵

Postcommunist transitology could be characterized as a more or less autonomous interdisciplinary social science approach,⁶ albeit inspired by an anticipating *global* transitology of so-called *third wave* democratization.⁷ The process of change in the postcommunist world could, according to many of the new transitologists, instructively be compared with earlier cases of “transitions”, but was also seen to exhibit unique characteristics (implying a trajectory from totalitarian communism rather than authoritarian capitalism), suggesting a need for organizing new academic platforms and networks.

THE AIM OF THIS ESSAY is two-fold. In part, the purpose is to critically analyze manifestations of 1990s postcommunist transitology, and to a lesser extent the postcommunist transitology of the early 2000s. Furthermore, the intention is to critically compare the

postcommunist concept of transition to the concept of transition in historical materialism prevalent in Soviet ideology up until 1991. On the basis of the conceptualizations that are being reconstructed, I go on to reflect upon the development around the fall of the USSR. I do this by looking at the postcommunist concept of transition from the viewpoint of its communist equivalent. In so doing, I attempt to give an account of a research program of the social sciences from the viewpoint of the humanities, trying to demonstrate a reciprocal need for *historical* reflexivity. An analysis of the conceptual foundation of transitology, it is argued, permits a better understanding of the premises of the conceptualization of the post-Soviet bloc, and how these condition the “pre-understanding” of development in this particular area.

Defining (teleological) transitology

When applied to the post-Soviet bloc, the term *transition* has functioned as part of an explanatory framework for conceptualizing, standardizing, and analyzing the changeover from autocratic communism to democratic capitalism.⁸ If the Western scholar initially was able to present the authoritative theory about the *purpose* of the process, his Central-Eastern European colleague was instrumental for its transmission and implementation,⁹ besides providing a helping hand in the accumulation of empirical data.

Talking about (postcommunist) transitology as a unitary phenomenon is, however, not unproblematic. Jordan Gans-Morse has convincingly demonstrated that research on transition generally has not been carried out within one and the same paradigm, other than in the eyes of some critics.¹⁰ Accordingly, the analysis undertaken in this essay does not concern transitology in general but is restricted to manifestations of “transitology” which could be seen as teleological, and special attention is paid to the more radical approaches. *Teleological* transitology is here understood as transition research in which regime change appears as purposeful, preordained and therefore predictable, virtually unstoppable, and impelled by a future goal. The essential feature of teleological transitology is that it structures analysis from the viewpoint of a defined end of the transition process.

TELEOLOGY MIGHT THUS be understood as reversed causality. In Aristotelian physics, ultimately the *final*, not the mechanical, cause drives development toward its end (*telos*).¹¹ Teleological tendencies will hopefully become evident by examining cases in a number of frequently cited sources of political and economic transitology, written by some renowned scholars.¹² In order to analyze the conceptual foundation of transitology, a hermeneutic method has been chosen, one that consists of a close reading and a contextualization, the former, however, being more critical than empathetic. The method is further characterized by historical comparisons of a few authoritative philosophical works along with theoretical reflections on the conceptualizations of transition which are expressed therein. These conceptualizations are then related and contrasted to the examples from postcommunist research on transition, within the framework of a general ideological contextualization.

Usually, economic and political transitions are studied from

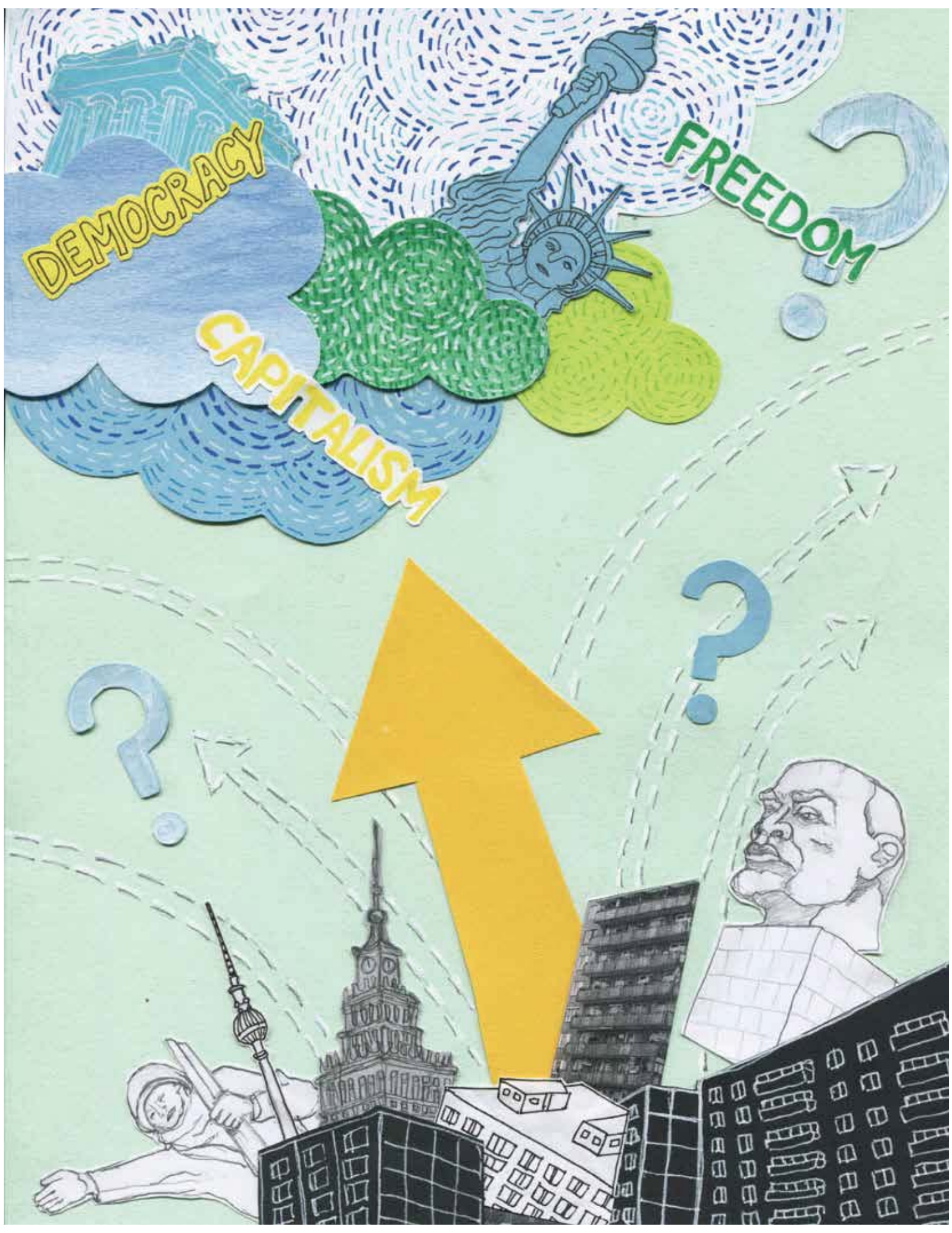
different disciplinary horizons, characterized by specific theories and methods. Although political transitology might have produced a more extensive meta-theoretical discussion and less orthodox teleology,¹³ here I will try to assimilate economic and political transitology in order to demonstrate their similar implications. This analytical collapse, it is argued, is partly justified not only by the fact that economic and political transitologists both structure their study object by means of concepts such as breakdown, reforms, liberalization, breakthrough, *transition*, stabilization, and consolidation. Transitologists of both disciplines, besides focusing on the same area and period, generally equate command economy and the one-party state, as well as market economy and democracy, although they don't necessarily regard the equivalencies as internally linked.¹⁴ Regarding economic transitology, I am particularly interested in scholarship with a bias toward what has been characterized as (neoliberal) shock therapy.

In the present text, however, it is not only political science and economic science which are brought together. Sometimes it is hard to maintain a distinction between transition scholarship and politics. This ambiguity arises partly from the fact that the difference is not always maintained by the transitologists themselves, not to mention their critics, who can fluctuate between the different roles of analyst and agitator. Sometimes, but far from always, the one who is *thinking* the transition is also *doing* the transition.¹⁵ Various forms of transitology have been constituted academically in conjunction with policy-making.

During the last decade, a substantial body of literature has emerged that is critical towards not only transitology's supposed positivist ethos but also its theoretical premises, notably the alleged Western bias and an unconditional commitment to democratization, as well as a privileging of structures and the game-theoretic focus on the maneuverings of elites.¹⁶ However, my point that transition models retain continuities with the past has also been made before, in various contexts. The argument that the seemingly neoliberal project of the post-Soviet transition from communism to capitalism is basically Bolshevism in reverse has perhaps been made most vehemently by Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glin-ski.¹⁷ Even so, my claim that postsocialist transitions have parallels in previous Soviet transitions is qualified differently. Instead of simply stressing resemblance in supposed ideological fanaticism, rhetorical intransigency or catastrophic outcomes, I try to trace the common *philosophical* roots and reconstruct the *structural* similarities between communist and postcommunist transitology's theoretico-ideological claims, on a deeper conceptual level. In so doing I try to cite some instructive examples which many times tend to be absent in common critiques of transitology.¹⁸

Reconstructing the meta-theory of postcommunist transitology

The concept of transition has been used as a tool not only to describe but also to guide¹⁹ a particular, sometimes purposive process, occurring during the so-called “Transition Era”,²⁰ in certain kinds of countries that traditionally have not followed the liberal road of modernization toward pluralistic democracies and free markets. The concept of transition implies an expectation of



democratization and marketization and can thus only be meaningfully applied to countries in which there is, or recently has been, a substantial mandate for Western modernization. A semantic characteristic of transition is that it tends to be defined in several discourses from the viewpoint of the objectives to be realized, which is one reason why it might carry teleological connotations. If the endpoint signifies the fulfillment of a certain number of formalized criteria, the starting point represents an absence of these.

In some cases, perhaps not representative for the study of transition among political scientists in general, but nevertheless illustrative of a transitological approach taken to its extreme, the transition to democracy and capitalism appears as “quite simple, even natural” and can in essence only be obstructed temporarily and then by external force – much in line with Fukuyama’s seductive prediction of the end of history.²¹

A more cautious and nuanced view on transition, with an emphasis on inherent uncertainties, contingent alternatives, and variations in outcome, was expressed in the studies of the early phase of “third wave” democratization,²² and has certainly been passed on to many researchers who have studied transitions of a later phase, postcommunism. Within this part of transitology, development is not exclusively judged from the point of view of its end, in terms of success (or non-success).²³ From this perspective, the Eastern European *transition* does not necessarily imply a hypothesized, *utopian*, closed-ended destination, but is rather conceptualized in terms of what critics of teleological transitology would like to see as *actual*, open-ended, processes of *transformation*, in which the introduction of new elements always takes place “in combination with adaptations, rearrangements, permutations, and reconfigurations of existing institutional forms [...]”.²⁴

TRANSITOLOGY NOT ONLY presupposes a movement between a preceding and a succeeding state, but also contains a global or holistic dimension. Even if transitions usually are not considered natural, the notion is not uncommon that it is advantageous to compare them, since they are posited to correspond to, or alternatively diverge from, a general transition *pattern*, for example the third “wave”. Thomas Carothers holds that the social scientists’ alleged transition paradigm includes a presumption that the transition from authoritarianism to democracy progresses in a particular sequence,²⁵ which, one might add, also is valid for many transition studies within economics. First there is an *opening* (cracks within the dictatorial regime appear accompanied by limited attempts at liberalization). Then follows a *breakthrough* (the regime collapses and a new system emerges), which finally evolves into a *consolidation* or stabilization (democratic forms turn into democratic substance through parliamentary reforms and a strengthening of civil society and market institutions). Carothers is not only critical of a supposed inclination to jump into an analysis of the (teleologically defined) consolidation phase. He is also generally critical toward the model’s alleged sequential and predictable character.

The collapse of communism constituted an unparalleled resource of political and economic comparative possibilities. The metaphysical approximations put forward in the classics of political economy could now be converted into operationalizable

hypotheses, which could be tested directly against an experience continuously unrolling in front of the eyes of the transitologist. However, due to the force of tradition, development in some countries of the post-Soviet bloc appeared to be either particularly facilitated or obstructed. Nevertheless, it was the *lack* that many times remained a constant, while the prerequisites for transcending it may have varied. In the long run, the question was, in some cases, not so much about how much as how *little* country x had become a consolidated democracy and market economy.²⁶

Eastern Europe in Western intellectual history

Lack, shortage, or absence, as representational forms, are worth noting, since the image of “Eastern Europe”, with its roots in the secularist degradation of a supposedly static, despotic, and oriental Byzantium during the 18th century, is often contrasted to Western European advances that Eastern Europe on the whole supposedly lacks.²⁷ These advances are usually thought to consist in knowledge of Roman law, civil society institutions, individualism, the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the early modern economic expansion, and the Enlightenment. The prominent historian Philip Longworth exemplifies this tendency in his thematic representation of Eastern Europe. He characterizes a number of institutions and traditions that are associated with Western Europe, and asks what the consequences are of their absence for development in Eastern Europe.²⁸ Consequently, if one accepts the conclusion drawn by Lucan A. Way, it is not surprising that “non-democracies [in transitological literature] have often been defined more in terms of what they are not than of what they are”.²⁹

In this way, teleological transitology encourages counterfactual historiography. The desirable institutions ultimately appear to be thoroughly homogenous and, consequently, transplantable to other contexts. The perspective, which is congruent with Adam Smith’s idea of an invisible hand, forces, by necessity, a production of alternative explanations for the fact that some of the countries under scrutiny do not develop with sufficient speed or even go astray: If only they would have had this or that tradition, or implemented this or that reform, or if they would not suffer so much from corruption, then it would have been possible to achieve a vibrant democracy and a prosperous market economy much faster.³⁰

Transitology’s methodology has been likened by some to making a checklist.³¹ Searching for empirical indices in relation to standards of monitoring organizations such as Freedom House seems to work fine when documenting *progress* on an externally defined trajectory (as is the case when EU candidates try to meet the union’s convergence criteria), but fares worse when one is analyzing non-teleological change and the sustainability of new forms of semi-authoritarian “hybrid” regimes. The quantitative nature of transitology, reflected in its dependence on the accumulation of vast amounts of data produced by international monitoring, auditing, and scrutinizing organizations,³² is, I would suggest, to a certain extent reinforced by the tangible semantics of *transition* itself, and may, possibly, have facilitated certain ideological perspectives at the expense of others.³³ The teleological focus on *absence*, char-

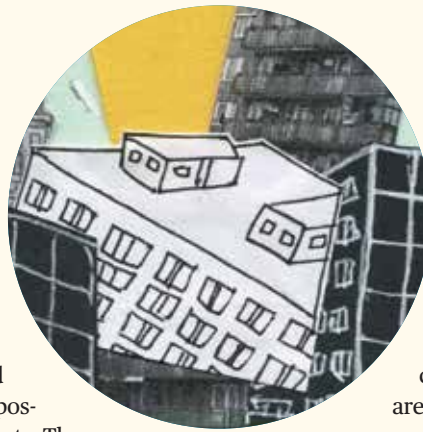
acteristic of thinking in terms of a checklist, has likely delayed the impact of alternative theories, such as those about (post-authoritarian) hybrid regimes.³⁴ Several more or less authoritarian, or at least semi-authoritarian, post-Soviet countries have for perhaps far too long been described by some researchers as “transitional countries”, that is, democracies in the making.³⁵ Mono-linearity and the taking for granted of a closed-ended development have, I contend, encouraged *ad-hoc* hypotheses about temporary hindrances and opposing forces, thus concealing an alternative logic of the events. The language of transition may therefore have amplified indications of democratic and market economy potentials and trends. The political scientist and international relations expert John Mueller contended in 1996 that “most of the postcommunist countries of central and eastern Europe [had] essentially completed their transition to democracy and capitalism [...]”. They were in fact, he continued, “already full-fledged democracies [...]”.³⁶ What was on the agenda now, he concluded, was not radical change but actual *consolidation* of already existing democracy and capitalism. Paradoxically, it has sometimes appeared as if the projected transition to democracy and a market economy not only was on the horizon, but also was achieved, at least hypothetically or anticipatorily.³⁷ The idea of a completed transition thus seems to be strengthened by its very prediction or even articulation. In the words of the renowned American sociologist Edward A. Tiryakian, the post-1989 transition to liberal democracy, if one excludes China and does not take into account variables of fundamentalism and nationalism, “is truly a miracle of epic historical proportion”.³⁸

Communist “transitology”

– *What is socialism? It’s the painful transition from capitalism to capitalism.* This joke was widely spread in Eastern Europe during the collapse of communism. It certainly reveals some historical irony but also indicates a characteristic circularity and terminological continuity. Although the concept of transition, as it is applied to East-Central Europe, has essentially become synonymous with a postcommunist development, it is instructive to note that the Soviet project, according to its own self-characterization, was defined in terms of transition. The Soviet state was a “transitional” one (*perekhodnoe gosudarstvo*), and socialism as such constituted a transition from capitalism to communism.³⁹ This definition had a polemical intent, with respect to the view supposedly held by the bourgeoisie of the social order as natural and everlasting.⁴⁰

Perestroika, as well, from 1985–1991, was frequently officially defined as a *transition* between different historical stages.⁴¹ Ironically, perestroika was increasingly perceived by its liberal critics during 1990 and 1991 as something that restrained the *real* transition, that is, the transition toward a market economy.⁴² The very concept of transition, figuratively speaking, was hence undergoing its own transition, alongside so many other Soviet concepts.⁴³

The representation of transition, as is obvious in the Soviet case, possesses a quality which in a sense accelerates development and, as we are about to see, transforms the present into a potential past, whose possible *raison d’être* lies in its capacity to be at



the service of the future. Transition thus *destroys* (the past), but also *produces* (the future). Whoever successfully applies the concept of transition to a given situation achieves the privilege of formulating the agenda and defining the common problems. When the concept finally takes off, our expectations are given a special structure.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that Vladimir Lenin, upon his return to Russia after the February revolution in 1917, defined development in terms of transition.⁴⁴ According to Lenin, the distinguishing characteristic of the situation at the time was that it consisted of a *transition*, a transition *from* the first stage of the revolution – where the bourgeoisie had taken power in the absence of an enlightened proletariat – *to* its second stage, where power needed to be transferred to the lowest social strata (or, one might add, their self-proclaimed representatives), who by then must, in one way or another, have improved their revolutionary consciousness.

The persuasive metaphor of transition is well chosen since it sanctions development without necessarily recognizing its current status. The (condemned) past and the (praised) future are positioned in an oppositional relation. Lenin’s audience is thereby placed within a process whereby the present – as actuality – is emptied of justification, which naturally affects the newly established bourgeois order. It is hence not only the past that is negated. Even if actual development achieves an epic dramaturgy, with a beginning and an end, it also loses some of its authenticity. Gorbachev’s definition of perestroika as transition rendered the contemporary institutions originating from the Brezhnev era, which he criticized, obsolete. If the concept is articulated successfully, the present is emptied of significance. It is then only perestroika (or its content) – in Lenin’s case the second, transitional, stage of the revolution – that can give the unsatisfactory present new direction and legitimacy. Meaning is thus created by locating the present in the shadow of a dark past, which is negated by the promise of a brighter future.⁴⁵

LENIN LABELED THE PASSAGE between capitalism and socialism with the word *transition* (*perekhod*).⁴⁶ Later on, the concept of transition was used in order to comprehend the passages between the internal stages of socialism and, finally, the qualitative change of socialism into communism. Indeed, the whole “science” of historical materialism might, if one likes, be rendered as a form of “transitology” in its own right.⁴⁷ With this taken into consideration, it is argued that the (temporary) success of implementing the *term* transition among post-Soviet citizens, in connection with the fall of the USSR, denoting a change from a command economy to a market economy, should be seen in relation to the previously omnipresent communist usage of the term “transition”. Even some structural aspects of the *semantics* of the Soviet concept of transition, as we are about to see, seemed to survive the collapse of com-

munist and the Soviet system and were to constitute influential connotations of the postcommunist transition in the early 1990s.

Communism and neoliberalism

The USSR was ultimately a project of transition, socialism in itself being something provisional. The transitory character was cited by the early Bolsheviks in order to legitimize a repressive order “temporarily” allowed to oppress capitalists, intellectuals and other petty-bourgeois elements, that is, the so-called oppressors from the *ancien régime*, until the day that actual communism could be realized.⁴⁸ Likewise, several postcommunist politicians, and to some extent also scholars with a neoliberal bias, seemed willing to defend virtually any social cost of development with reference to the omnipotent “Transition”. (Naturally, this should have been more common among those who essentially affirmed a particular political agenda only in the *name* of transitology.) The massive flight of capital, the plundering of natural resources and the nepotistic relocation of state property in Russia during the first half of the 1990s – which hardly can be said to agree with market economy ideals – were legitimized as a part of the “Transition”.⁴⁹ In Soviet rhetoric it is not surprising that words like “turning point” (*povorot*), “overturn” (*perevorot*), “revolution”, “acceleration”, “progress”, “stage”, “level”, and “leap” were so common. This kind of transitional conceptualizing sanctions frequent albeit abrupt movements where it is possible to overcome the past and irreversibly commit to the future – something that always necessitates some degree of sacrifice. Even if this idea has to some extent been an integral cognitive structure of the modern project in general since the 18th century,⁵⁰ it played a particularly constitutive role in the Soviet project. Perhaps, then, it is not by accident that post-Soviet economic and political rhetoric of the 1990s has often employed a terminology that reflects a structural analogy with traditional Marxist discourses: *The future will become radically different, although real change only occurs in great leaps. With the help of knowledge about the laws of economic or political history, development can be accelerated.*

WHAT IS BEING SUGGESTED here is the idea that this structural similarity may have facilitated a neoliberal discourse on transition to achieve a hegemonic status, perhaps particularly among the post-Soviet political elite in Boris Yeltsin’s Russia. Certainly, an abundance of persuasive aphorisms were used not only by political advocates of shock therapy, but also by transitological economists in the early 1990s, which might well have appealed to a Lenin or a Stalin (when justifying revolution or collectivization). Phrases like “you cannot cross a chasm in two jumps” and “you don’t pull teeth slowly”,⁵¹ are congruent with the denotation of transition, that is, the irreversibly absolute and essentially abrupt passage from one condition, location, or earlier stage of development, to another.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, two prominent transitologists, once attempted to “canonize” Machiavelli as transitology’s progenitor. First and foremost, they attributed this position to Machiavelli by virtue of his modern perception of political outcomes as essentially artifactual and contingent, albeit uncertain, products of human action.⁵² Additionally, one could emphasize his rationalist understanding of the actor-centric, intentional, “possibilistic”, calculable, and directed character of regime shifts.⁵³ Even though political change, according to Machiavelli, is 50% subject to unpredictable fortune, the latter can, to a certain extent, be manipulated by virile and adventurous statesmen. This formula expresses a kind of reconciliation between voluntarism and determinism that we also find in modern transitology.⁵⁴ However, also Machiavelli’s analytical split between what in retrospect could be seen as *raison d’état* politics and common sense ethics,⁵⁵ is instructive in the genealogy of postcommunist, as well as communist discourses on transition, many of which could be expressed in the formula: “Whatever helps in the struggle is good; whatever hinders, is bad.”

THE ABOVE MAXIM could certainly have been voiced so as to release an Italian Renaissance prince from the restrictions of Christian conscience and pity, but it was, in fact, actually written 400 years later by the Bolsheviks to legitimize the brutality by which the Russian proletariat should establish its dictatorship.⁵⁶ The neoliberal interpretation of the process of economic transition also presupposes an idea that moral ends can excuse immoral means. “Hard” and “undemocratic” measures in Russia during the 1990s were, according to the influential transition economist Anders Åslund, not only necessary practically in the process of reform implementation, but also historically legitimate, with the increasing *expectation* of future democratization taken into account. The lack of political freedoms and rights were, as presented by Åslund, excused with the notion that these freedoms and rights would eventually follow in the wake of the economic freedom currently being implemented. The faster the short-term transition in the present, the lower the long run social costs.⁵⁷

What could appear as undemocratic decision-making should according to Åslund be understood in the context of Russia’s undemocratic past. A culture of democratic compromise, presumably in contrast to a real market economy, needs time to develop. Russia’s traditions hence called for a more “robust and radical approach” than what was needed in for example East-Central Europe. In Russia’s case it would have been, according to Åslund, “lethal to hesitate or move slowly”.⁵⁸

Hegel — and the negation of negation

The Soviet concept of transition, denoting the *change* from quantity to quality, not only has an *indirect* origin in Hegel by virtue of its occurrence in Marx (the latter being a disciple of the former). When, in 1914, Lenin conducted his close reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, he didn’t simply implicitly plea for the integration of the great idealist into the Soviet canon, but also identified Hegel’s concept of *Übergang* (transition) as perhaps the most important concept in dialectics.⁵⁹ Lenin claims, as does Hegel, that every-



thing in reality is *mediated* and linked together through transitions. According to him, it is when one understands the *transitions* that the radical element in Hegel's thought appears, namely the possibility of thinking negation – or contradiction – as an immanent part of the system.⁶⁰ Although it is possible – if one does not take into account Machiavelli's sixteenth-century doctrines on how to obtain and maintain power – to draw a relatively straight line from Condorcet's eighteenth-century idea of social progress, Lamarck's and Darwin's nineteenth-century teachings on natural evolution, through 1950s modernization theories, to the 1970s democratization concept of Dankwart Rustow, it is precisely in Hegel's work that some of the premises of the Soviet usage of the concept of transition, from Lenin to Gorbachev, become visible.

Transition is essentially a relation, which is constituted by opposition. In a transition, we find the later condition's negation of the former. Ontologically, the most fundamental categories, that is, being and non-being, constitute an inseparable unity, which gives rise to permanent transition and becoming. According to Hegel, any single entity contains its own opposite. Since being, which in its pure form is empty of determination, also includes non-being, *becoming* constitutes a kind of a determined synthesis.⁶¹

Transitions arise through dialectical tensions. A common characteristic in transitions is that they lead from the lower toward the higher.⁶² In a transition, a qualitatively *new* state of things is at stake. Communism, the final goal of the Soviet project, does not, however, if we are to believe its ideologists, contain any dialectical or qualitative transitions. This is due not only to cessation of the class struggle, but also to oppositions and negations becoming totally alien, since there is no longer any need to make class-based distinctions between human beings.⁶³ The transitions during slave society, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism are, according to historical materialism, brought about by the tensions and demands of class society. For that reason, communism does not know of any transition, and therefore signifies the end of history.

GIVEN THAT ANY TRANSITION, at least in Lenin's interpretation of Hegel, is about the later condition's negation of the previous one, it becomes intelligible why Gorbachev, like all his predecessors, was so obsessed with criticizing previous mistakes – the “mistakers”, however, being represented in an Aesopian language. If for Gorbachev the flaws were conveyed as the “deformations” and “stagnation” of socialism,⁶⁴ tacitly attributable to the rule of Brezhnev, Brezhnev himself had repeatedly preferred to talk about “voluntarism” and “subjectivism”,⁶⁵ thereby putting the blame on Khrushchev. In Khrushchev's case, what prevented the building of communism had been the “personality cult” of Stalin, and those atrocities it had concealed and begotten.⁶⁶

In a notoriously critical assessment of late Soviet reforms, the chemistry teacher and Stalinist Nina Andreyeva exclaimed the following:

I would very much like to understand who needed to ensure, and why, that every prominent leader of the party Central Committee and the Soviet government – once

they were out of office – was compromised and discredited [...]? Where are the origins of this passion of ours to undermine the prestige and dignity of the leaders of the world's first country of socialism?⁶⁷

Andreyeva's call not only reflects resentment or frustration but also reveals the negative nature of the dialectic of Soviet transitions, which in turn can be seen as a way of coping with a universal condition of modernity. Modern temporality namely contains a paradox: Why doesn't history develop linearly in accordance with its immanent forces and in line with scientific prognoses? In all revolutions, there has been a problem that those who are to build the new order were socialized during the *ancien régime*.⁶⁸ During one of his many moments of tactical retreats, Lenin proposed that socialism's dependence on capitalism was to be re-interpreted as a positive resource: The future could only be built “with the hands of one's enemy”.⁶⁹ Rather than neglecting (or extinguishing) all cadres of bourgeois engineers, one should make use of their competence for one's own purpose. As I see it, transitology, communist and postcommunist alike, provides a solution to the problem of non-linear temporality, since development is believed to be dependent on its antitheses. A transition must take its beginning in the position it negates, and therefore continuously reproduce it – most importantly, for the sake of its own legitimacy. In the case of communist transitology, in contrast to its postcommunist counterpart, one is also trying to persuade oneself that the remains of the energies of the earlier system, in a somewhat mysterious way, can be selectively transformed and channeled into the new system.

HENCE, DIALECTICAL transitions can only be brought about if they are loaded with antagonistic energies. One of the essential meanings that Gorbachev extracted from perestroika, while simultaneously defining it as a “transition”, was precisely “negation”, as well as “negation of negation”.⁷⁰ That which was negated was the deformations of socialism, which should set the present free from the problems which had been generated in the past. Ironically, postcommunist transitology as well has often adopted an attitude of pure negation toward the order it has transcended in its analyses, and a hierarchy between different historical stages has been established, which I see as reminiscent of Marx's historical materialism as well as Hegel's dialectical logic. The antithesis must by definition be *criticized* but also reproduced. The roots of current problems – that is the antithesis – are, accordingly, derived and defined backwards not only in communist, but also in postcommunist transitology. According to Åslund, it is when the prevailing paradigm (of the old generation) *appears* as out-of-date that the public's acceptance for shock therapy can increase.⁷¹ The old knowledge producers appear obsolete only when they are confronted by the *new* producers of knowledge, and vice versa. Furthermore, a similar kind of symmetry between a “presentist” historiography and a teleological “futurology” could be identified. Perhaps in jest, but also, in a historical sense, ironically, more than a few post-Soviet transitological studies have been modeled on older narratives, indicated in their titles.⁷²

Gorbachev tried to transform and improve the system – instead he turned out to be the one to bury it.

A transition from theory to experience: Problems of anachronism

The concept of transition not only functions as, to use a term from discourse theory, the “nodal point” in an explanatory framework which structures and standardizes empirical data; it also has turned into a historiographical signifier, which encompasses a defined period after the fall of communism. The teleological implications, however, might carry a risk whereby we would tend to understand history backwards and reduce the complexity of development to a simplified narrative, with notions of a beginning, turning point, climax, and sense morale, which essentially reflect the contemporary standards of our own cultural horizon.

Traditionally, Marxism has been ascribed a notorious preference for reducing the reproductive sphere of the family to an epiphenomenon, that is, seeing it as a function of the productive sphere, which is where the seeds of industrialization and ultimately revolution lie. In an analogous manner, during the 1990s and early 2000s, empirical hypotheses about micro-level social change in the lifeworld were on occasion notably influenced by nomothetical discourses on macro-level change in economics and politics.⁷³

YET IF SCHOLARS DO not distinguish between their concept of transition as an explanatory and historiographical construct on the meta-level, and a lived experience of the actors in the empirical world, they might be misguided. The discourse and project of “transition”, justified by Hegelian dialectics and the Marxian philosophy of modern history, was something that Soviet Man had been subjected to since the October Revolution. The problem acquired contemporary relevance when sociologists and anthropologists started carrying out fieldwork in the post-Soviet bloc, in the wake of the paradigmatic (political and economic) articulation of transition. In a qualitative study on how the Kyrgyz people carry on with their everyday lives – during the *Transition* in the macro world – one of the respondents produced an answer, that, in its simplicity, may be used as a corrective for some of our prevalent presuppositions: “How we perceive the transition? We’ve lived in transition for 70 years.”⁷⁴

During the 1990s, transition was one of the strategic keywords within postcommunist research. As outlined by teleological transitologists, the transitional movement is, at least in theory, asymmetrical and progressive. As a historiographical device of postcommunist studies, transition can either comprehend development after the fall of communism generally, which leads to our own present, or also include the Gorbachev era in this process.⁷⁵ When scholars apply the concept retroactively to the preceding Gorbachev era, they should, however, note the fact that the horizon of expectation of *that* era was not primarily characterized by an irreversible movement forward.⁷⁶ Political and cultural *retrospection* – the fixation with counterfactual alternatives and choices of destiny as well as the rehabilitation of “people’s enemies”⁷⁷ – indicated a common hope of the ability to *return* backwards and enter alternative, previously ignored or suppressed paths of development, which were assumed to have been crystallized in

the domestic past. The concept of transition might in this context conceal that the perestroika matrix was essentially horizontal and symmetrical. It was only in 1990, if not 1991, that a change of system eventually became a part of the general agenda in Soviet Russia. The idea that the USSR should follow a Western model was thus not yet ubiquitous. On the contrary, there were even prominent scholars in the West who believed that Soviet perestroika instead should be spread to the rest of the world.⁷⁸ The historiographical assimilation of perestroika into the 1990s logic of events is problematic since the former is a *bygone* past in our very present. That era was the scene of a staging of a political project irrevocably exhausted. The perestroika project was launched in a context and a historiography in which “communism”, for example, still enjoyed some, albeit small, sense of international legitimacy, which it indisputably does not today. The point is that if perestroika is understood as the first stage of *post-Soviet transition*, one must take into account that history is reconstructed backwards and that development is reduced to a formal, if not teleological scheme. When applying the postcommunist concept of transition to (late) Soviet conditions, there is a dual risk of blurring our own concept of transition with the Soviet equivalent and tending to substitute the authentic horizon of expectation of the Gorbachev era with our own, which is essentially different, and that makes many past actions and policies appear as irrational. The *results* of the historical process, or its retroactively defined goals, have come to determine how we perceive the *process* as such.

ANDERS ÅSLUND, who will be taken as an example in the following, is a Swedish scholar and an internationally renowned transition economist who has used the concept of transition teleologically. In a widely cited work, the Gorbachev era is portrayed as an embryo.⁷⁹ The reform policy is described as essentially insignificant, although innovations such as the introduction of free speech played a role in Russia’s “real transition”.⁸⁰ It is worth dwelling on that latter expression. The period 1985–1991, on the one hand, and 1992 and onwards, on the other, are hence separated by an ontological barrier. The former period serves as a temporal prelude to the latter. Even if Åslund’s image of Gorbachev also contains significant elements of sympathy, Gorbachev is generally represented as someone who obstructed positive development – while a politician like Yeltsin facilitated it. All the following evaluative judgments⁸¹ are to some extent symptomatic of a teleological transition perspective that conceives history anachronistically: Gorbachev made “naive” statements, had “little to offer but platitudes”, contributed only to a “half-hearted” democratization and made “almost every conceivable mistake”. Gorbachev was a master of “peaceful destruction”, which facilitated making the world a better place, but he did not present any alternative to the old system and did not understand the intrinsic value of economic reforms. In contrast to Yeltsin, who appeared as dynamic and receptive to younger advisors, Gorbachev was a politician with “flaws” and “shortcomings”, he was non-pragmatic, non-flexible and uneducated, “very much a product of [the] system”. These judgments are probably conditioned by the fact that during the first half of the 1990s Åslund acted as an adviser to the Russian government under

Yeltsin, Gorbachev's archenemy. However, they could also be seen as symptomatic of the teleological implications of a *retroactive* perspective. What makes Gorbachev's actions impossible to explain with reference to theories about rational choice is that he, according to Åslund, delayed development, by neglecting the optimal alternatives that history had placed at his disposal. These optimal alternatives are, nonetheless, only relevant, one may conclude, in relation to a referential horizon created retroactively. If the final objective already during perestroika would have been spelled out as the kind of liberal market economy that Åslund recommended

during the 1990s, then it would be natural to think that what eventually actually happened *needed* to have happened.

Teleology thus risks concealing possible alternatives. The fall of the USSR appeared as "inevitable" in Åslund's view; the system was impossible to reform, and the question was actually never *whether*, but "how and when it would fall". Gorbachev's actions, particularly concerning the nationality question, simply "speeded up the process".

Besides a historiographical anachronism, which I have tried to illustrate with

examples from anthropology and economics, there is a peculiar *ideological* dimension of teleological transitology. This implication becomes evident by the fact that the questions of whether the transition has been launched, *which* transition has been started, and whether it should be continued or is completed, ultimately are political ones. Andrew C. Janos proposes that the development in East-Central Europe can be described as a change from one international, albeit Soviet, hegemonic regime to a new regime, externally imposed as well, equally international in form but "Western" in content.⁸² Janos's conclusion is drastic and possibly too generalizing but points to the changeable context within which the "real" transition is defined and evaluated, hence illustrating the contestable character of the concept.

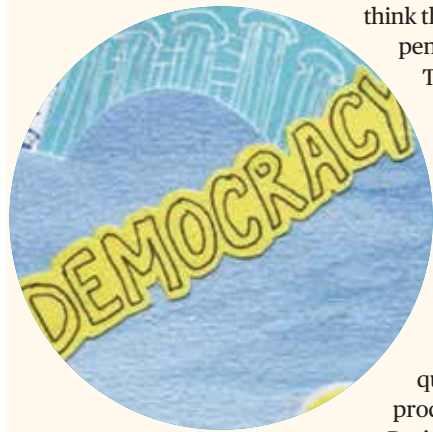
Concluding remarks

If a particular conceptualization of transitional change is not informed by its wider historical context, there is a risk that a teleological bias will be reproduced, which in extreme cases manifests itself as an inverted mirror of communism. Another problem with a teleologically conceptualized transition is that the standardized goal might prove to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. The starting point, in a number of heterogeneous countries, has in many cases been reduced to a monolith, analytically positioned at the service of the objective. The starting point, along with the endpoint, thus become generalized abstractions empty of ontological content. The end – perfect democracy or market economy – as well as the outset – totalitarian communism – are constructed into ideal opposites. Although he is aware of the risks of generalization and

simplification, Åslund holds that the direction and end of the transition are best understood by means of a reconstruction of the "typical features" and "key characteristics" of the communist system, *per se*.⁸³ According to Archie Brown, however, the USSR more or less ceased to be "communist", at least in any qualified sense (except when it came to official self-definition), in 1989.⁸⁴ If Brown is right, Åslund's approach could be seen as symptomatic of a tendency in radical versions of teleological transitology to reconstruct the starting point of transition dialectically, re-presenting it as negated negation, so that the imagined outcome not only would be able to legitimize continuous development away from negativity, hence making it possible for the researcher to conveniently tick off the items on the "checklist", but also, in its turn, would be able to justify itself by the constitutive *lack* that is characteristic of the starting point.⁸⁵

With the above taken into consideration, one is tempted to ask whether there really can be such a thing as non-teleological transitology. I believe there can be, although it might appear as puzzling that even Gans-Morse, who more or less denies the existence of an academic *teleological* transitology, nonetheless emphasizes the analytical and comparative advantage of hypothetically approximating a closed *endpoint*.⁸⁶ In so far as any kind of *transitional* thinking, teleological or non-teleological, implicitly refers to the modern project's cognitive structure of temporality, reflected in, although not equivalent to, Hegelian dialectics, "transition" seems, to one extent or another, to connote progress (or, alternatively, degeneration), hypothetical or not.

A more problematic question arises, however, as to whether the transition to socialism is at all commensurate with the transition *out* of it – a commensurability which indeed has been assumed in this essay – not least since the entirety of practices and the political rationale in the respective transitions were very different. The designs of political-economic transformations may have been legitimized by a common language, but nevertheless, some would object, they were also specific responses to particular situations at unrepeatably historical junctures. Both "transitions", the communist and the postcommunist, if one may conflate different processes in different countries during different periods, denote a qualitative social conversion but were based on different philosophies of history. The socialist as well as the capitalist transitions have been conceptualized as movements from necessity to freedom, although necessity and freedom were understood in diametrically opposed ways. The end of the process is equated with either freedom to be part of a collectivistic system or freedom *from* such a system. The postcommunist realization of the individual's, or consumer's, free choice, would from a communist viewpoint probably be depicted as the deployment of blind market forces. The planned economy and one-party state, designed to maximize the collective's "positive" freedom, might from a postcommunist viewpoint be interpreted as an institutionalization of the shortages and dependencies always characteristic of the kingdom of necessity. If the communist aspires for freedom *from* the market, the capitalist conceives of freedom as unthinkable without the market. In politicized postcommunist transition discourses, negative freedom was usually promised almost immediately, while conditions



of an equally distributed material empowerment were seen as something of an eventual consequence. The short-term and long-term aims of socialist transition were, in relation to capitalism, different in content although similar in form. What was promised immediately after the revolution was *positive* freedom. Positive material resources, for example reprographic technology, would be placed at the hands of the workers, while “negative” liberties, such as freedom of speech, were reserved for the future, when socialism was supposed to develop autonomously without capitalist or foreign intervention.⁸⁷

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE substantial differences between the projected transitions’ respective contents, the argument in this essay is that there are commensurate elements in their form as well as logic. In both the imagined transitions, if communist historico-philosophical transitology is compared to postcommunist *economic* transitology, economy is seen as superior to politics, and development could be accelerated if the political “superstructure” is put at the service of the economic “base”. In the early 1990s, it seems, some influential economists were able to formulate a broader political agenda. A rapid marketization was in their eyes a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for growing the fruits of political freedom.⁸⁸ Although essentially different, one can see that historical transitions also from a communist viewpoint appeared as asymmetrical, irreversible and unconditionally progressive. In the words of the Marxist historian Raphael Samuel, they were during the middle of the 20th century perceived as “being ‘identical’ in content everywhere”.⁸⁹ And albeit understood as necessities, they could be hastened by human effort. These claims were, unconsciously, passed on into the post-Soviet era. One further example is that the leading role of the “working class” during Soviet times, in Yeltsin’s Russia was taken over by the so-called middle class – virtually indefinable but increasingly attractive to identify with – which was analogously represented as the vanguard of transition, that is, the subject of history. Considering postcommunist transitology’s emphasis on competing elites within the regime and the opposition, it is, however, perhaps better to characterize it as voluntaristic rather than deterministic, which, in a sense, would make it more “Leninist” than orthodoxly “Marxist”, to use an analogy.

IN THIS ESSAY, I have focused on “Soviet” and “post-Soviet” transitions in particular, but have also tried to encompass “communist” and “postcommunist” ones in a more general sense. I see the conflation as being, if not justified, so at least tentatively excused for historical reasons, in particular since the “Soviet bloc” and the “Communist” or “Eastern bloc” were used synonymously during the Cold War, indicating a general asymmetry of *Soviet* influence. This being said however, the *expectation* of a postcommunist transition must certainly have taken different forms within the late-Communist bloc, with respect not only to historical and social factors but also to the nature and scope of the previous area-specific *experience of socialist* transi-

tion. Further studies are needed on the *heterogeneity* of cold war era communism in order to critically assess postcommunist development.

In a postmodern academic climate where it becomes increasingly custom to ironically or reflexively write words like “transition” in quotation marks, one should bear in mind that the competitive paradigms in which one claims to identify a dynamic *stability* of post-authoritarian “hybridization”, sometimes presuppose a negative variant of the check-list thinking found in transitology, that is, looking for the *failure* of democratization rather than its success.⁹⁰

Turning to Hegel, we find that even the concept of stability presupposes change. When a particular political or economic definition of “transition” becomes hegemonic, however, there is a risk of evaluating diversified aspects of social reality from a homogenizing point of view, which also might be anachronistically obscured. History without doubt contains elements of revolutionary, but also hesitant and contradictory, transition, side by side with an equally contradictory dynamic stability. These features cannot be justly comprehended if we do not try to see their immanent historicity, and dialectics between continuity and discontinuity, within the past as well as the present. ❌

references

- 1 See Aryeh L. Unger, “On the Meaning of ‘Sovietology,’” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31 (1998).
- 2 In the latter case one is approaching contemporary problems of the “East” by virtue of an area-based knowledge of the past, interpreting development from a model of exceptionality. See for example Stefan Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence* (London: Routledge, 2005).
- 3 An organizational example illustrates this peculiar paradigm shift. Research at the Dept. for Soviet and East European Studies at Uppsala University, with roots going back to the early 1970s, was marked by the Cold War and characterized by “Kremlinological” hermeneutics, inspired by linguistic findings in Slavistics. In the early 1990s, “Soviet” was dropped from the department’s name. The re-naming corresponded to a radically new research program, communicated on the department website, in which one was looking toward the future, in a comparative way, more than idiographically focusing on the past, although the center housed essentially the same group of teachers and researchers. “Om oss” [About us], DEES, Uppsala University, accessed June 28, 2005. http://www.east.uu.se/om_inst.html.
- 4 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), xv.
- 5 Archie Brown, “The Russian Transition in Comparative Perspective,” in *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader*, ed. A. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University



- Press), 457; Rudolf L. Tőkés, “‘Transitology’: Global Dreams and Post-Communist Realities,” *Central Europe Review* 2 (2000). <http://www.ce-review.org/00/10/tokes10.html>. When it came to Russia, the fall of communism triggered a paradigm conflict between what appeared as older and younger Western scholars. In polemics with the new generation’s universalistic concepts of transitology, some of the former Sovietologists persisted with traditional theories where the concept of totalitarianism was still significant. See Anders Åslund, *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1995), 312, with Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund, *The Baltic States and the End of the Soviet Empire* (London: Routledge, 1993). Since Russia would be determined by cultural factors radically differing from Western ones, the latter predicted a failure of quick-fix Westernization. In short, one could generalize by saying that the new generation was criticized for attributing too much significance to the political changes, while the old generation was mocked for not being able to predict or explain change at all.
- 6 One should note that the term *transitology* (sometimes *transitionology*), which I here use heuristically, has hardly been used self-referentially with any great frequency (as in the case of Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?” *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 174), but has indeed been used rather pejoratively by its critics, e.g. Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Postcommunist Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 21. In order to avoid a connotation of “scientificity”, methodological unity, or essentialism, potentially inherent in any “ology”, one could perhaps simply speak of “transition studies”, which might be associated more with multidisciplinary and reflexivity, e.g., Furio Honsell, “The Times They Are A-Changin’: Research Networks for Understanding and Disseminating Transition and Innovation,” *Transition Studies Review* 11 (2004).
- 7 Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Even if fragments of a theory of regime shifts can be detected in Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), VIII; Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. R. F. Stalley and trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), III; and Polybius, *The Histories*, 12 vols., ed. E. Capps et al. and trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1922-1927), the birth of modern transitology is usually not dated until the early 1970s. Dankwart A. Rustow is often referred to as the “father” of transitology. See Dankwart A. Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2 (1970). His theoretical framework was corroborated by empirical case studies from the mid 1970s and onwards, in pace with the fall of the authoritarian regimes in the “South”. Schmitter and Karl, “Conceptual Travels,” 173-174. See also Guillermo O’Donnell, Phillippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian rule*, 4 vols. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986). It is, however, a matter of debate whether postcommunist transitology was ever assimilated into global transitology. See for example Jordan Gans-Morse, “Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 20 (2004). Nevertheless, during the 1990s, the postcommunist countries appeared as *transitional countries par excellence*. It should, also be stressed that a postcommunist transitology, and its supposedly autonomous character, is significantly less identifiable today, after the admission of many former socialist states to the EU and NATO.
- 8 Cf. Honsell, “Times,” 1.
- 9 Cf. Brown, “Russian Transition,” 457. N. B. also the striking ratio of Western to Eastern European authors writing about postcommunism in the most prestigious social science journals. Vassilis Petsinis, “Twenty Years After 1989: Moving on From Transitology,” *Contemporary Politics* 16 (2010): 308.
- 10 Gans-Morse, “Transitologists,” 323, 334, 338-340. Even if excellent academic research on transition usually is not characterized by teleological bias or even reflecting a common theoretical framework, as Gans-Morse has it, this would not contradict that a meta-theoretical ground, and with it a teleological (if not radically teleological) transition concept, have been mediated within other structures of academia. Besides exemplary academic research, curricula, course designs, and research networks, are also essential components of what constitutes a “paradigm”. See Tomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 177. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the creation of many an academic school dedicated to the study of development in the former communist bloc, understood as a transition process, the knowledge thereof being defined as the key to society’s prosperous future. E.g. “Mission Statement,” SITE, Stockholm School of Economics, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.hhs.se/SITE/AboutUs/Pages/MissionStatement.aspx>; “About CREECA,” CREECA, University of Wisconsin-Madison, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www.creeca.wisc.edu/about.html>.
- 11 In Aristotelian physics, a change in nature or society is explained by taking into account *four* kinds of causes. Aristotle, *Physics* (Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision Publications, 2007), E-book, II, chap. 3. The *final* cause is the most significant but presupposes the three other ones. Besides the *material* and *efficient* causes – the only two to survive the Scientific Revolution – there is also a formal cause – a remnant of Plato’s metaphysical doctrine of forms. According to Aristotle, the *formal* cause of the octave in music is the mathematical relation 2:1. For Aristotle, the full answer to the question “why” a thing has come into being must thus take into account the change’s inherent plan or design (form). Accordingly, insofar as a part of it can be considered “teleological” in Aristotle’s sense, transitology should not necessarily conceive development only deterministically. Although the validity could be questioned, one could perhaps ask whether this is not exemplified when the transition economist Anders Åslund suggests that certain key actors possessed the original plan *beforehand* according to which the transition in Russia accomplished its final goal. Åslund, *Market Economy*, 312.
- 12 In this essay, economic transitology will above all be represented by the internationally renowned transition economist Åslund.
- 13 Gans-Morse, “Transitologists,” 334.
- 14 John Mueller, “Democracy, Capitalism, and the End of Transition,” in *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives*, ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), 140; Åslund, *Market Economy*, 312; See Gans-Morse, “Transitologists,” 323; Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002).
- 15 See for example Åslund, *Market Economy*, 12; See János Kornai, “Ten Years After *The Road to a Free Economy*: The Author’s Self-Evaluation,” in *Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics 2000*, ed. Boris Pleskovic and Nicholas Stern (Washington: The World Bank, 2001), 61.
- 16 See Carothers, “End of the Transition Paradigm”; Maksym Zherebkin, “In Search of a Theoretical Approach to the Analysis of the ‘Colour Revolutions’: Transition Studies and Discourse Theory,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42 (2009); Tomas Kavaliauskas, *Transformations in Central Europe Between 1989 and 2012: Geopolitical, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Shifts* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012). However, the earliest critique of post-Soviet transitology dates back to the early 1990s. See Gerner and Hedlund, *Baltic States*; Sarah Meiklejohn Terry, “Thinking About Post-Communist Transitions: How Different Are They?” *Slavic Review* 52 (1993).
- 17 Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia’s Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy* (Washington: The United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001). See Cohen, *Failed Crusade*, 23-30, 151-155; Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, introduction to *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist world*, ed. M. Burawoy and K. Verdery (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 4.
- 18 Cf. Gans-Morse, “Transitologists,” 335.

- 19 *Transition Report: Economic Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Ten Years of Transition* (London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development [EBRD], 1999); *Transition Report: Growth in Transition* (London: EBRD, 2008). Cf. *Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat* (London, *The Economist* Intelligence Unit, 2010).
- 20 Honsell, "Times," 1.
- 21 Mueller, "Democracy," 104. Cf. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* No 16 (1989).
- 22 Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, vol. 4 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3.
- 23 See, e.g., Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics* 54 (2002).
- 24 David Stark, "Path Dependence and Privatization: Strategies in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 6 (1992): 22. In this paper, I understand *transformation* more broadly than transition, comprising also non-teleological and relative change, including processes of "hybridization", and focusing on practical social outcomes more than on preconceived models and policies.
- 25 Carothers, "End of the Transition Paradigm," 7.
- 26 See Michael McFaul, "The Second Wave of Democratic Breakthroughs in the Post-Communist world: Comparing Serbia 2000, Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004, and Kyrgyzstan 2005" (Danyliw/Jacyk Working Papers, No 4, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto, 2005), 1. <http://www.utoronto.ca/jacyk/files/wp4-mcfaul.pdf>.
- 27 Cyril Mango, *Byzantium and its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire and its Heritage*, vol. 1 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 37-38; Mats Andrén, *Att frambringa det uthärdliga: Studier till idén om Centraleuropa* (Hedemora: Gidlund, 2001), 35-36.
- 28 Philip Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1992).
- 29 Lucan A. Way, "The Evolution of Authoritarian Organization in Russia under Yeltsin and Putin" (Kellogg Institute Working Paper, No 352, The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2008), 2. <http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/352.pdf>.
- 30 Cf. Marie Lavigne, "Ten Years of Transition: A Review Article," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33 (2000): 476. Linz and Stepan, who for long carried out transitory research on the "South", but eventually extended their scope to include the "East", have used their accumulated knowledge in order to derive a generalized corrective. They draw conclusions from the "Southern" examples about how the "Eastern" transition *should* have been carried out. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems*, 436.
- 31 Carothers, "End of the Transition Paradigm," 18; cf. Joakim Ekman, "Political Participation and Regime Stability: A Framework for Analyzing Hybrid Regimes," *International Political Science Review* 30 (2009).
- 32 Cf. Matilda Dahl, "States under Scrutiny: International Organizations, Transformation and the Construction of Progress" (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2007).
- 33 In the 1990s, several competing notions prevailed as to the nature of the *ideal* economic transition. *Shock therapy* was virtually hegemonic, at least initially, but *theoretically* challenged from the viewpoint of *gradualism*, which paid attention to institutional development rather than to mere scale and speed of privatization and liberalization. Jozef M. van Brabant, *The Political Economy of Transition: Coming to Grips with History and Methodology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 102-105. The division between shock therapy and gradualism was, however, greater in the beginning. Eventually, one might suggest, a kind of practical, yet also theoretical, convergence occurred.
- 34 See Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002); Ekman, "Political Participation."
- 35 See Thomas M. Nichols, "Putin's First Two Years: Democracy or Authoritarianism?" *Current History* 101 (2002); Elena A. Korosteleva, "Party System Development in Post-Communist Belarus," in *Contemporary Belarus: Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, ed. E. A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); McFaul, "Second Wave."
- 36 Mueller, "Democracy," 102-103.
- 37 E.g. Åslund, *Market Economy*, 3.
- 38 Edward A. Tiryakian, "The New Worlds and Sociology: An Overview," *International Sociology* 9 (1994): 132.
- 39 Vladimir Lenin, "Gosudarstvo i revolyutsiya," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 33, by V. Lenin (Moscow: Politizdat, 1962), 90.
- 40 Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1969), § 69.
- 41 E.g. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenye dlya nashei strany i dlya vsego mira* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1987), 48.
- 42 "Perekhod," in *Slovar perestroiki*, ed. V. Maksimov (St. Petersburg: Zlatoust, 1992), 157.
- 43 In retrospect, Gorbachev's reform concepts may appear as "vanishing mediators". As I have written elsewhere, the continuing practice of rhetorical redescription helped mobilize and radicalize his policy but also drove an irreconcilable wedge into official ideology, which undermined the foundation of the system. The Hegelian-style accelerating "Aufhebung", of, e.g., *glasnost* to *freedom of speech*; *socialist pluralism* to *pluralism* alone; the *transition to communism* to a *transition to capitalism*, and of *planned economy* to *socialist market* (then to *market socialism*, *mixed economy*, and, finally, *market economy*!), is instructive for the logic of the Soviet collapse and indicative of the dialectics between political and conceptual change. Kristian Petrov, "Construction, Reconstruction, Deconstruction: The Fall of the Soviet Union From the Point of View of Conceptual History," *Studies in East European Thought* 60 (2008): 196-197.
- 44 Vladimir Lenin, "O zadachakh proletariata v dannoi revolyutsii," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 31, by V. Lenin (Moscow: Politizdat, 1962), 114.
- 45 Cf. Reinhart Koselleck *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 34.
- 46 Lenin, "Gosudarstvo," 86.
- 47 Immanuel Wallerstein, "From Feudalism to Capitalism: Transition or Transitions?" *Social Forces* 55 (1976).
- 48 Lenin, "Gosudarstvo," 89; cf. Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *ABC*, § 48.
- 49 Brown, "Russian Transition," 456.
- 50 Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 167-168.
- 51 Brabant, *Political Economy*, 102-103.
- 52 Schmitter and Karl, "Conceptual Travels," 174.
- 53 Cf. Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1998), 147-148.
- 54 For Åslund, the fall of communism, i.e., the starting point of transition, appeared as inevitable, but the fulfillment of the transition's goal was essentially "a manifestation of idealism". Åslund, *Market Economy*, 35, 312. In other words, there indeed seems to be an inherent contradiction between universalism and voluntarism in this version of transitory, which might cause problems when, for example, it comes to generalizing the results. Cf. Paul Kubicek, "Post-Communist Political Studies: Ten Years Later, Twenty Years Behind?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33 (2000): 296.
- 55 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. W. K. Marriott (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1908), 78, 86, 120-122.

- 56 Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *ABC*, § 23.
- 57 Anders Åslund, *Därför behöver Östeuropa chockterapi* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 1993), 45-46; Åslund, *Market Economy*, 11-12, 314.
- 58 Åslund, *Market Economy*, 11-12.
- 59 Vladimir Lenin, "Konspekt knigi Gegelya 'Nauka logika'," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 29, by V. Lenin (Moscow: Politizdat, 1963), 162.
- 60 Lenin, "Konspekt," 92, 159, 190, 203.
- 61 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Wissenschaft der Logik: Erster Band die objektive Logik," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 11, by G. W. F. Hegel (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1978), 43-44.
- 62 Lenin, "Konspekt," 128, 162, 249.
- 63 "Programma kommunisticheskoi partii sovetetskogo soyuza: Novaya redaktsiya prinyata XXVII sezdom KPSS," *Kommunist* No 4 (1986): 101-102.
- 64 Mikhail Gorbachev, "Revolutsionnoi perestroike – ideologiyu obnovleniya," in *Izbrannye rechi i stati*, vol. 6, by M. Gorbachev (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989), 65.
- 65 Cf. "Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich," in *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, 3rd ed., vol. 28, ed. A. Prochorov (Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1978).
- 66 Nikita Khrushchev, "O kulte lichnosti i ego posledstviyakh: Doklad Pervogo sekretarya TsK KPSS tov. Khrushcheva N.S. XX sezdu [KPSS]," *Izvestiya TsK KPSS* No 3 (1989).
- 67 Nina Andreyeva, "Ne mogu postupit'sya printsipami," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 13 mars, 3. Author's translation.
- 68 Cf. Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).
- 69 Vladimir Lenin, "Otchet Tsentralnogo komiteta 18 marta," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 38, by V. Lenin (Moscow: Politizdat, 1963), 142.
- 70 Mikhail Gorbachev, "Prakticheskimi delami uglyublyat perestroiku," in *Izbrannye rechi i stati*, vol. 5, by M. Gorbachev (Moscow Politizdat, 1988), 210; Gorbachev "Revolutsionnoi perestroike," 63, 66.
- 71 Åslund, *Chockterapi*, 45-46, 52.
- 72 E.g. David Lane and Cameron Ross, *The Transition from Communism to Capitalism: Ruling Elites from Gorbachev to Yeltsin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Anders Åslund, *Building Capitalism: The Transformation of the Former Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Anders Åslund, *Russia's Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed* (Danvers, MA: PINE, 2007).
- 73 I.a. Frances Pine and Sue Bridger, introduction to *Surviving Post-Socialism: Local Strategies and Regional Responses in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. S. Bridger and F. Pine (London: Routledge, 1998); Christoph Neidhart, *Russia's Carnival: The Smells, Sights, and Sounds of Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 11.
- 74 Quoted by the German anthropologist Judith Beyer, January 16, 2009, The End of Transition? Analytical and Local Understandings of "Transition" (conference), University of Aarhus.
- 75 E.g. Linz and Stepan, *Problems*, 367.
- 76 Cf. Kristian Petrov, "Russia in the European Home? Convergence, Cosmopolitanism and Cosmism in Late Soviet Europeanisation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65 (2013): 323.
- 77 See Katerina Clark, "Changing Historical Paradigms in Soviet Culture," in *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
- 78 Ernst Gellner, conclusions to *Perestroika: The Historical Perspective*, ed. Catherine Merridale and Chris Ward (London: Edward Arnold), 237; Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Gorbatschow: Versuch über den Zusammenhang seine Gedanken* (Hamburg: Arkiv, 1989).
- 79 Åslund, *Market Economy*, 26.
- 80 Åslund, *Market Economy*, 26.
- 81 The following quotes in this paragraph all appear in Åslund, *Market Economy*, on pages 27-28, 31, 34-36, 38, and 51.
- 82 Andrew C. Janos, "From Eastern Empire to Western Hegemony: East Central Europe under Two International Regimes," *East European Politics & Societies* 15 (2001): 222.
- 83 Åslund, *Market Economy*, 3.
- 84 Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 105.
- 85 It is, as we have seen, with the help of the argument about Russia's undemocratic past that Åslund recommends "hard measures" (i.a. regarding price liberalization). Åslund, *Market Economy*, 11-12. The historical lack of democracy is referred to in order to legitimize what some would perceive as the new elite's undemocratic control of the old elite. The validity of the argument is comfortably reassured if one ignores the democratization within the parliamentary (Congress of People's Deputies) and the journalistic (glasnost) sphere, whose first steps of consolidation *de facto* were taken during the USSR's last years.
- 86 Gans-Morse, "Transitologists."
- 87 *Konstitutsiya RSFSR 1918 goda*, ed. O. Chistyakov (Moscow: Izdatelstvo MGU, 1984), § 14; Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *ABC*, §§ 48-49.
- 88 Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: From Earliest Times to 2001* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 596.
- 89 Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London: Verso, 2006), 47-48.
- 90 Cf. Carothers, "End of the Transition Paradigm," 10.



Abstract

The postcommunist concept of transition, as it was in use during the 1990s and early 2000s, is analyzed from the viewpoint of its intellectual prehistory. The concept is partly contrasted with alternative notions, partly relocated to its antithesis of communist ideology, where “transition” actually was an established concept. Via Hegel and Lenin, the concept’s logic of asymmetry and negativity is theoretically demonstrated. One thesis is that radical versions of *teleological* postcommunist transitology have unconsciously reproduced an essentially *communist* conceptualization of change that may generate new ideological biases and misconceptions. The reconstruction of the dialectics between communist and postcommunist transitology indicates and responds to a need for historical reflexivity.

Keywords

Transition, Transitology, Shock Therapy, Historical Materialism, Conceptual History, Hegel, Lenin, Åslund