# Afterimage of the era of eternity

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*If eternity exists and if eternity has a name,*
*its the name of Tito*
*Refrain of a popular late 70s Yugoslavian rock song*

**Prologue**

On December 26th, 1952, the second day of Christmas, in the town of Lodz in central Poland, the Polish constructivist painter and art theorist Władysław Strzemiński died. This artist, who created the theory of the so-called *unism*, claimed that what matters is not the way we see an individual view, but what remains in our visual memory soon after we see it and close our eyes. The images we see on the inside of our own eyelids are truer, because they reflect the essence of how we perceive our surroundings.

In 1948–49, the artist created a cycle or the so-called *solarist* paintings in which he captured such afterimages that remain after staring at the sun.

„The Sun of the Nations", Joseph Stalin, at the time cast his bleak light not just on Poland: *stalinism* cast its dark shadow on all the European nations enslaved by the Soviet Union – south of the Baltic and east of Oder.

Strzemiński *died of starvation* – previously known and valued as an artist, who, among other things, founded the Higher Art School of Lodz and the Contemporary Arts Museum, wounded veteran of WWI – he could get no job, not even the simplest mental work or even menial labour, because the

communist regime in Poland successfully cut out the creators who resisted the official artistic direction of socialist realism.

Socialist realism was supposed to point towards the new direction of the development of humanity, to express the aim for eternity that was understood as the bright future of humanity, which doubtlessly was supposed to be communism.

Less than two months after Strzemiński's obscure death, on the 5th of March, 1953, Stalin died, and millions wept.

Two more days later, one of the largest Polish cities, Katowice, the Silesian industrial capital, was renamed *Stalinogród.*

The story of a genius crushed by stalinism that lorded over Poland in the 1950s, based on the tragic biography of Strzemiński, was told by Andrzej Wajda in his lasts movie *Afterimages.*[1]

In order to better understand what *the epoch of eternity* was, as it dawned in the European continent from the Baltic to the Black Sea and from the Carpathians to the Adriatic immediately after WWII ended, let us close our eyes for a moment and remeber every historical fact we know, every story we have ever heard, as told in hundreds of books and movies, monographs, biographies, memoirs, theater plays and even comic books.

What remains underneath our eyelids will be our personal concept of history, which has been described in various ways dozens of times and titled, for example, *building the wall*, or *how we survived communism and even laughed about it*[2] – it is different for everyone, not necessarily based on family stories or tales from friends and neighbours, but one way or another, familiar.

Our personal *afterimages* do not presume to entirely cover this topic, but it's precisely the layers of them, the combination of those afterimages, the stories great and small, that is the intangible witness of our own relationship with ourselves as part of what happened to *us*. Their role is important, as they are a tiny, but a very prominent effect of history, its continuation, the outcome of the processes of the time, not only in real life, but first and foremost, in the human consciousness – our own, that of our parents and grandparents, the generations that are slowly leaving, and only their afterimages remain with us.

1 *Powidoki*, 2016.

2 Title of a book by Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulić

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Lipica, a small town near the Slovenian-Italian border, early summer, lazy afternoon, broad foliage of linden trees – so beloved by the Slovenians that they have become part of the cannon of national symbols – casting long shadows along the low wooden fence that runs over wide green meadows. Behind the fence is a herd of the special horses of *pure white race*[3], called the lipizzaners, once the pride of the Habsburg's Imperial Court in Vienna.

The story of these horses began in the early 16th century, when on this spot, among the karst hills, near the city of Trieste down by the bay, a herd was established. At the same time it was a summary of the history of the monarchies of Danube, its reduction full of ups and downs, mythic symbolism and folk legend.

The prosaic animal that helped man in his daily toils from the dawn of time, in the fields, in conquests, in battles, in building trade routes – it was the symbol of civilization that ensured communication, development of trade and agriculture. Once sung by poets and appreciated for their loyalty and stamina, depicted in medieval European flags and coats of arms (the Lithuanian Vytis being the perfect example), up to the 20th century, horses were silent, but inseparable witnesses to our history.

In fact, not always and not entirely *silent*.

Edvard Kocbek, the famous Slovenian poet and essayist, who was born in 1904 under the Habsburgs and died in socialist Yugoslavia a year later than Tito, also wrote this:

*while others worshiped holy cows and dragons,*
*thousand-year-old turtles and winged lions,*
*unicorns, two-headed eagles and phoenixes,*
*we chose the most beautiful beast,*
*tried and true in battle fields and circus arenas,*
*who carried princesses and golden monstrances,*
*therefore the Viennese emperors talked in French with clever diplomats,*

3 The book *Brother Mendel's Perfect Horse* (Dier, bovendier) by the Dutch writer and reporter Frank Westerman was published in Slovak as *Čista biela rasa* (Pure White Race) by Absynt in 2019.

*in Italian with fabulous actresses,*
*in Spanish with the endless God,*
*in German with their lowly farm hands,*
*but they talked in Slovenian with their horses.*[4]

An example of elitism and also of egalitarianism – the white lipizzaner horses survived the tumultuous history of the two world wars as it tumbled over their karst hills only thanks to a miracle. Their epic rescue (albeit told about the horses of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna) even appeared on the big screen in Walt Disney Studio's 1963 film *Miracle of the White Stallions*. So much earlier than the audiences got to enjoy the story of how the American soldiers saved Private Ryan, the moviegoers on both sides of the Atlantic had the chance to see – thanks to the Holywood film industry that was emerging at about the same time – how the same soldier (and even the famous General George S. Patton himself) saved the white horses that represented a particular era of the European history that was just then approaching its unavoidable end.

In this new post-war Europe, the audiences needed entertainment to forget their war time experiences. Viewing the then-recent events of the war through the horse rescue operation presented exactly that – *another* point of view. Of course, the film was also shown in Austria, which had only restored its independence and its status of *eternally neutral* state eight years ago. It was becoming more and more difficult for the residents from the eastern part of the city that had become the capitol of East Germany to go to the cinemas in West Berlin, where the film was also shown. Less than two years after the premiere the city's division was finalized by the wall which itself was destined to become a symbol of the new era and (after it ended) "perform" in numerous films produced later.

In Trieste, which had been an inalienable part of Italy, after the de facto (but not yet de iure) termination of the Free City of Trieste founded in 1947, part of whose territory was occupied by Tito's guerillas at the end of the war, and later that part was divided into the so called Zone A (British and American government) and Zone B (Yugoslavian government), and later still, to Italy and Yugoslavia, Slovenians also had the chance to see the

4 After the Polish translation by Joanna Sławińska.

film – those who lived around the city in large numbers (as the still living witness of the era Boris Pahor[5]), and those who lived *beyond the limit* – as in, the newly drawn border. The new border actually divided the single (and homogenous) historical region that was not divided by any borders for centuries – therefore here, in the karst plateau in the north of the Istrian peninsula, the borders still felt illusory.

In his historic speech in Fulton, Missouri, the USA, on the 5th of March, 1946, Winston Churchill said: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."

These words that symbolize the order that was later dubbed the *Yalta system*, being the first mention of the description *iron curtain*, were evocative and entered the cannon of the descriptions for the so-called *Cold War* era situation in Europe – there's another new phrase that it matched.

Even though they were correct and reflected the true situation in 1946, when they were spoken, as soon as two years later they had lost part of their relevance – at least regarding Trieste, but also regarding the Yugoslavian dependence in the *Soviet zone*.

Yugoslavia, while, of course, was a socialist country under autocratic rule of Josip Broz Tito and the Communist Party, still found itself in the shadow of the "iron curtain" rather than on a particular side of it.

5 Boris Pahor (born August 26th, 1913) – one of the most prominent Slovenian writers, born in Trieste and connected to it throughout his life. Many of his works are dedicated to the city, like *Oberdan Square*. During the interwar period, he was part of the Slovenian resistance against Italian fascism that persecuted them, during the WWII, he was imprisoned in Dachau, Stutthof and other concentration camps. After the war he opposed the communist ideology of Tito. The most important elements of his work are the topic of fascism and of nationalisms in the Slovenian and Italian border territory and experiences of life in the nazi concentration camps. He is considered a moral authority for the Slovenian minority in Italy.

It was the only country in the so-called Eastern Block that was not "liberated" by the Soviet Army in 1945, and at the same time it was the only European country that ended the WWII as victor, with its territory liberated by its own resistance movement – Tito's guerillas. In 1948, Yugoslavia left the so-called Communist International due to a conflict between Tito and Stalin. There are testimonies that Stalin attempted to murder Tito numerous times in order to rid himself of the competitor and take control of Yugoslavia. At the time, Tito supposedly sent him a message: "I know you've already sent five people who were supposed to kill me. We've caught them all. You better stop all that, because once I send someone over, I won't have to attempt twice."[6]

When Stalin died in 1953, Tito announced the foundation of the Non-Aligned Movement and in 1961 organized the inaugural conference of the states that had joined the new movement. In 1964, he began applying the so-called *self-governing socialism* political mode, and that resulted in widespread (compared to other socialist countries) liberalization of economics, diminished central planning and opening of borders. However, before that was successfully achieved, Yugoslavia had to stand its ground against the Soviet Union, which considered Yugoslavia part of its realm, the territory of victorious socialism – another *fortress* in building the new era of the bright future.

As already mentioned, since the Soviet tanks did not reach the Adriatic, Tito de facto won his run-in with Stalin during the so-called ComIntern crisis if 1948, when the Yugoslavian Communist Union left the organization. Confrontation with the USSR was also a convenient excuse to crush the – real and presumed – opposition inside the country. Thousands of people, members of the Party and regular citizens, were charged with Stalinism and / or spying for the Soviet Union and repressed. The Goli Otok[7] island in the Adriatic Sea became the location of the notorious labour camp with conditions to match the most cruel instances of Gulag. The island in the Kvarner Gulf, where thousands of people, mostly declared "enemies of the regime of SFRY" suffered and often died, was only a hundred kilometers away in a direct line from the Brijuni islands West of Istria, where one of

6 Jože Pirjevec, *Tito in tovariši*, Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana, 2011

7 Božidar Jezernik, *Goli otok – Titov gulag*, Modrijan & FF, Ljubljana, 2013

Tito's favorite representational residences was located and where he invited important visitors from abroad.

The guests would see the Yugoslavian image like from a postcard – exactly like the one presented by the Yugoslavian Bureau of Tourism and the examples of which we may still see in the surviving original posters advertising trips to Yugoslavia or encouraging the use of the services of JAT, the Yugoslavian airlines – sunny beaches of the Adriatic, charming landscapes of the Slovenian Alps, Macedonian lakes, whitewater mountain rivers of Bosnia, wild peaks of Montenegro, picking grapes in Vojevodina, and everywhere, happy smiles of the people.

Before the war, the Brijuni Islands did not belong to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They only became part of the new socialist Yugoslavia after the war, when SFRY extended its walls by annexing the land by the sea at the expense of Italy. Zadar, like numerous islands by the Dalmatian coast and in the Kvarner Gulf as well as almost all of the Istrian Peninsula used to belong to the Kingdom of Italy.

Rijeka, in Italian called Fiume, was occupied by Gabriele D'Anunzio in a most spectacular, simply theatrical fashion in 1919 during the so-called March on Fiume and declared to be the capital of the short-lived Regency of Carnaro, later became a Free City according to the Treaty of Rapallo, in 1922 it was finally incorporated into Italy, and after the war it again became Yugoslavian Rijeka annexed to the socialist Republic of Croatia that was part of the union. The city, which was de facto divided before the war (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia only controlled the southern suburbs, the so-called Sušak, and the historic part of the city remained on the Italian side, the border went along the River Rječina), was united again.

The episode with the Regency of Carnaro was a sort of prelude into what was destined to come, as d'Anunzio, a particularly colorful personality, hero of WWI, writer, politician and schemer, considered to be the founder of the fascist ideology, obtained the chance to implement – even briefly – his ideas of *new order* precisely in Rijeka. The idea to implement the new ideology was soon supported by Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and other builders of the era of eternity – in its fascist version.

However, fascism fell, and *eternity* rolled into the waves of the Adriatic and the Baltic along with the last salvos of the WWII, and builders with a different vision of eternity came to replace it.

As the new Yugoslavian borders finally emerged, the unionized Republic of Slovenia acquired a narrow exit to the sea and the lands in the Karst Plateau. The historic city of Gorizia north of Trieste was walled off the rest of the remaining region called *Goriška* and the so-called Slovenian Primorje, and in 1947, the decision was made to build a new city of Nova Gorica, right there by the wall that cut off the historic Gorizia.

The blueprint for the new city was personally authorized by Marshal Tito, and the prominent Slovenian architect Edvard Ravnikar, student of the famous Le Corbusier and follower of his ideal city vision, was invited to carry it out.

New country needed new symbols. Nova Gorica was supposed to be new not only in name, it was supposed to become exactly such a symbol, a visible step in the construction of the new era, its tangible proof right by the wall, thus to be visible in the literal sense. The newly planned city connecting all the former suburbs of Gorizia beyond the railway line with the nearby settlements of Solkan, Kromberk and Rožna Dolina into the new organism of the city was intended to outweigh the ancient Austro-Hungarian buildings of the historic Gorizia beyond the wall with its new modernist functional architecture and thus highlight the advantages of socialism. The most intense stage of the construction took place throughout the 50s and 60s, but in fact the city was still being built up until the 80s and Tito's death in 1983.

Thus, Nova Gorica may truly be considered to be a symbol of sorts for Tito's Yugoslavia, or even its distilled essence: built newly from the ground, connecting the various pre-existing elements into a single whole and expanding them, right at the border of the Western world.

The construction of Nova Gorica was a job not only for Slovenians, but for the whole of Yugoslavia. In 1948, the Yugoslavian People's Youth Association announced a call to form youth working brigades for the construction of the city. The karst hills saw an influx of more than 5000 youth, about 3000 of them came from Slovenia, and the rest from other Yugoslavian republics. By the end of 1950, five apartment buildings were already standing in the city, four more were erected in the final stage, Nova Gorica already had a resident population of more than 700. In 1952, a new regional museum building appeared in the city, and in 1965, a hospital and the Primorje Drama Theater.

In 1975, Yugoslavia and Italy signed the Treaty of Osimo and finalized the regulations regarding the border between the two countries. According to this document, border crossing posts were opened between Italy and SFRY, including the one in Fernetti (Fernetiči) – in Snežana, in Nova Gorica itself and in the nearby settlement of Vrtojba, right south of the city. The city enjoyed a boom of tourism, mostly thanks to a company with the self-evident name HIT, which was in charge of building legal casinos in the city, Italians and other visitors from beyond the wall separating the two worlds, the capitalist and the socialist one, arrived in throngs. However, the socialist world, in Marshal Tito's imagination, had acquired clear signs of *protestantism* in relation to the Soviet model that reigned in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe. It was especially evident on the Adriatic shores and at the border crossing posts in the karst plateau (also on the Austrian border in Styria and Carinthia) - on both sides the cars lined up for kilometers at a time.

The Western tourists traveled to the Julian Alps and Dalmatian beaches, and the SFRY citizens went shopping to Tireste or Graz, and also to get jobs in Germany, thus becoming an exceptional phenomenon at the height of Cold War. SFRY foreign policy based on the Non-Aligned Movement, its relatively liberal, though still planned economy and its open borders, and most of all, the lack of the Soviet factor, meant that the Yugoslavian diplomats obtained weighty arguments to turn the country into a special bridge between East and West. The Yugoslavian passport was one of the few that allowed visa-free travel – in both directions! – over the Iron Curtain. The citizens of SFRY did not need visas to enter the majority of Western European countries (except Sweden and Switzerland), but also the socialist countries and the USSR. As they could travel, most of the Yugoslavs actually did feel free, therefore they trusted Tito's regime – even though it was authoritarian – much more. The citizens of the socialist countries – Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland or East Germany, not to mention Romania or Bulgaria – could only dream about such a freedom to travel: in all those countries the process of obtaining a passport was strictly controlled by the security agencies and was an important factor that forced the citizens to stick to appropriate discipline. A refusal to issue a foreign passport was a usual thing, the reason could be lack of loyalty to the government of the people, the "wrong" class origin or simply subjective views of the officer.

Even to those who obtained the precious passports they were issued only for a particular trip, and were supposed to be given back up upon return, they could not be kept at home.

Of course, a foreign passport was not enough in itself: travels to all the countries, except for socialist ones, required entry visa, and that was quite a task. True, the residents of the majority of those countries had it easier when traveling within them, for example, in the 60s and 70s in Poland, the Polish IDs had *passport inserts*[8] that allowed the owner to travel to East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and USSR, but not to Yugoslavia[9].

Similarly, in all those countries trips to Yugoslavia were evaluated more strictly and equated to trips to capitalist countries, therefore a foreign passport was necessary, and so was some exchanged currency, etc.

Unlike the Western tourists who chose Yugoslavia as increasingly attractive and popular holiday destination, the residents of the socialist countries typically (sometimes mostly) traveled to Yugoslavia hoping for a chance to get out to the West with relative ease – mostly from East Germany and Romania, but also from Czechoslovakia (after the Spring of Prague was crushed), Poland, Hungary and other countries.

From the most isolated European socialist country, Albania, which broke its connections not only with the USSR, but also with the Soviet satellites and Yugoslavia, one of the few remaining possible routes of escape led over the cold waters of the Yugoslavian border lakes Ochrid and Skadar. The majority of the intrepid were caught by the Albanian border patrol, some were returned by the Yugoslav guards, and some are sleeping forever at the bottom of the lake, shot by the Albanian soldiers, vigilantly guarding the borders of the only country on the right course to the bright future.

One way or another, Yugoslavia was an important detail in the complex

8 See the photo of the Polish passport insert in the appendix.

9 Until 1976, the citizens of communist Poland needed a foreign passport in order to travel to SFRY, later a special passport insert was introduced, valid only for travels to Yugoslavia. This document was issued based on a similar form as for a foreign passport, and similarly as a foreign passport (unlike the usual passport insert), it was only issued for a single trip, and also for a bigger fee than the passport inserts for traveling to other socialist countries. *See photo in appendix*

mosaic of *Cold War* – for its own benefit: even such hot spots of the divided continent as West Berlin, where Yugoslavs – among the few, unlike the citizens of East and West Germany – could easily cross the border, and without even having to exchange currency according to the mandatory official rates, many of the SFRY citizens living in the divided city (of course, on the Western side) gradually saved up for villas on the Adriatic – simply thanks to their own wits and the little red book with *JSFR Pasoš* and the coat of arms featuring six flames forming a crown and simbolizing the unity of Yugoslavia on the cover.

Finally, the private pensions on the seashore were not the only thing to pop up in Yugoslavia – the whole country saw intense constructions, the architecture was monumental according to the spirit of the era, it was later described as *brutalism* – not only in the capital Belgrade, but also in the fast-growing capitals of the republics: Podgorica of Montenegro, renamed Titograd as early as 1946, in Skopje, ruined by the earthquake of 1963 and rebuild by the joint forces of the whole Federation. Sometimes it acquired special forms, like the *Ilinden* monument in Kruševo, Macedonia: in 1974, the memorial was opened to commemorate the uprising against the Osman rule of 1903, and also the anniversary of the Antifascist Macedonian National Liberation Assembly of 1944. The building resembled a spaceship and became a visual symbol of the far-reaching image of the new era in its golden years. The Slovenian writer Drago Jančar in his essay "Memoirs of Yugoslavia" described the Yugoslavian golden age in one sentence: "Yes, we lived in an era of immortality and eternity. One rock band reached a great popularity with a song called "The Name of Eternity". Its refrain went: "If eternity exists / if eternity has a name / it is the name of Tito."

YUGOSLAVIA IS TITO, the banners read. After Tito's death, some suggested, and others considered entirely seriously, to rename Yugoslavia in his honor.

When Tito came for an official visit to Prague in 1968, he was welcomed by joyous crowds. Waiting to see the reaction of the USSR to Dubček's reforms in the period called the Spring of Prague was in the air. The country was euphoric, for the first time since the oend of the war, the borders were slightly opened, the press took a fresh breath, having lost the shackles of all-encompassing censorship, debates about the necessity of economy reforms were bursting all over the place. Czechoslovakia desired not to turn away

from socialism, but to reform it, to provide it – as they said back then – with *a human face*. In fact it meant creating a model that would sort of resemble the Yugoslavian one. Unfortunately, such hopes were forlorn, as only one Yugoslavia could exist under the conditions of Cold War.

Czechoslovakia was the only country in the Central and Eastern Europe were communists usurped the power not immediately after WWII. The communists came to power in the first post-war election in the democratic fashion and soon enough took full control by removing their opponents. Let us take as an example Jan Masaryk, the son of the founding father of the First republic Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk, who by his presence, just like President Beneš, legitimized the first coalition government which included the communists. On the 10th of March, 1948, he died under suspicious circumstances, supposedly falling from the window of his home in Vinohrady of Prague.

Milada Horakova, a famous interwar reporter, legend of the armed resistance of the times of the Protectorate, prisoner of concentration camps, member of the parliament, did not capitulate after the putsch that the communists organized in February 1949 and continued to speak up about illegal activities of the communists led by Klement Gottwald. Arrested in June 1949, she was tried in a kangaroo court and sentenced to death on trumped up charges, *treason of the people's Homeland*. The sentence was carried out on the 27th of June, 1950.

The era of eternity was in full bloom.

On the 22nd of December, 1949, to commemorate the 70th birthday of Stalin (Horakova's trial is then well underway), the decision was made to build in Prague a monument to the *Great Leader*. It had to be not just any monument: comrade Gottwald was ambitious, he presented clear guidelines – it has to be a monument to *immortality*, the bright era of communism that would last forever.

The idea was to build not just the world's largest Stalin's monument (16 m tall, 37 m including the base), but also a monument to communism's advantage over capitalism. The construction began in February 1953, when the dictator in fact had less than a month to live. On the Letna hill by the Vltava River, 17 tons of construction materials were brought, mostly granite and concrete blocks. The composition of figures was supposed to represent the leader of all times and all nations, marching at the head of the crowd to

the communist victory. On his right went the Czechoslovaks – a peasant woman, a worker man, an intelligentia communist (embodied by Julius Fučik) and a soldier, and on his left (east) – representatives of the soviet people: a worker with a flag, a kolkhoz woman, an agrobiologists (the idea was that it should be Michurin) and a soviet soldier. It was supposed to be the largest composition of figures in Europe.

The construction took two years, it ate up 140 mln krons and took the lives of six workers. Finally, on the 1st of May, 1955, the monument was opened to a great fanfare. Less than a month before the opening, the famous Czech sculptor Otokar Švec, author of the project, took his own life. While he was still working on the monument, his wife also died of suicide.

In November 1962, the monument was torn down. The giant composition was blasted with dynamite for days, and Stalin's head removed manually; during these works, another worker died.

It was only five years and a little over eight months before the "crash" landing of the Soviet airlines *Aeroflot* at the Prague airport, which was the beginning of the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia and which marked the final disillusionment of the Czechs and the Slovaks regarding the communist *future of mankind*.

As the Stalin monument was being erected in Prague, the tallest building the country had ever seen was rising in its neighbor Poland. The Palace of Culture and Science, as the *present from the soviet people*, was supposed to be built in the center of the new post-war Warsaw – the capital, according by the official slogans, *rebuilt by the whole nations*.

The building was supposed to be 237 meters tall, and its architecture was clearly inspired by the Moscow skyscrapers, whose style, later dubbed the monumental *stalinist umpire*, was thriving throughout the largest cities of the Soviet Union – Moscow, Kyev, Kharkov and Minsk.

The project was the creation of none other than *generalissimo* Stalin. Ruined Warsaw soon became one large construction site, and it was a perfect chance to shape the new face of it and of people's Poland. Stalin's loyal architect Lev Rudnev was tasked with improving the project by adding elements typical of the Polish historic architecture, therefore he went to the location, visited Polish cities, looked over the surviving architectural treasures of Cracow, Zamosc, Lublin and other cities. Thus the project was topped up with the so-called Polish attics crowning the main corpus of the

building and other separate elements. The construction took place from the 1st of May, 1952, to the 26th of July, 1955, and cost the lives of sixteen workers.

Even before the construction was finished, two days before Stalin's death, on the 3rd of March, 1953, the Party issued a decree to officially name the building Joseph Stalin's Palace of Culture and Science.

The idea was to put Stalin's monument before the central entrance, and there was even a call to participate in the competition, but eventually it did not happen. On both sides of the entrance, the sculptures of Adam Mickiewicz and Nicolas Copernicus were built, and around the sides, a dozen more compositions of figures, athletic figures representing the people – a student girl with a book, a worker with a wrench in his hand, an others. On the 30th floor or the building, 114 meters high, a viewing platform was opened – the whole of Warsaw was seen from there, and a bleak joke in the city said you could even see Moscow. As early as 1956, the terrace came to be frequented not only by lovers of panoramic views, but also suicides. Eight fatal jumps later, the government decided to limit access to the terrace, and later, to install grates. Since then, the view of the city opens through the grate.

People who were desperate for a chance to leave the country that was becoming more and more depressingly gray were left with truly limited choice. The borders were shut, and only inner emigration remained.

In 1954, Stanisława Lem published his book *Sesame and Other Stories* – the first stories from the famous cycle of "Star Diaries", which soon made him world famous. The hero of these stories, Ijon Tichy, is traveling the endless space and visiting distant galaxies – it turned out that imagining intergalactic travel in the communist Poland is more realistic than a trip to the Adriatic, besides, it was a way to escape the overwhelming socialist realism – in arts, literature, architecture and morals.

In 1961, two of the most famous Lem's works appeared and brought him worldwide acclaim: *Solaris* and *Return from the Stars*. They were translated and published in many European countries and in the USA. The writer was invited to present his books, give lectures, meet readers – but still he could only dream of the greater part of his trips abroad, outside the socialist camp, and the dreams seemed much more daring than flying to Alpha Centauri.

When Lem's work also became popular in the Soviet Union, and the famous Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky announced his plans to adapt

*Solaris* to the big screen, Leonid Brezhnev invited the writer to Moscow and, as a sign of special affection, granted him permission to visit Lvov – his native city, which the writer was forced to leave after the war. The Poles born in this city and, before it finally became part of the USSR after WWII, gone to Poland during the so-called "repatriation" were forbidden to visit there. The prohibition was rather strict: for example, the soldiers to whom the prohibition applied, on the Warsaw-Lvov-Chernivici-Bucharest-Sofia train going for a vacation in the "brotherly" socialist Bulgaria, were not even allowed to step out on the platform when the train briefly stopped in Lvov.

However, Stanisław Lem did not accept the generous gift from Kremlin and never came back to Lvov, and the communist government of Poland only issued the writer his foreign passport in 1982. Taking advantage of that, he briefly visited West Berlin, invited by his publisher[10], and from there he went to Vienna. Lem's novel *The Chain of Chance* contains a scene in a futuristic airport of Rome which the writer imagined as he was living in socialist Poland. Only in West Berlin did he get a chance to actually see how a large airport functions. There were two airports in the Western part of the city. The old *Tempelhof*, a remnant of the Third Reich, enthusiastically built by the nazis in the late 1930s, was the world's largest airport, exceptional in its majestic, monumental nazi era architecture, and after the city was divided, it ended up really close to the Wall and used as the US air base. There was also the newer *Tegel* airport built in the 50s in the northwest, where most of the Western countries' airlines flew. The West German *Lufthansa* was forbidden from flying into West Berlin, and the East German *Interflug* only flew from Schoeneveld airport in East Berlin. The only line that flew to *both Berlins* – Schoeneveld in the *East* and Tegel in the *West* – was the Yogoslavian JAT.

The famous writer, world-famous sci-fi creator, futurologist who had foreseen some inventions of his own time, for the first time flew a regular plane and looked out the window at the divided city. Down below he could see Spandau, Charlottenburg, Kreuzberg, Spree River – and *the wall*. The wall was clearly visible. The wall, which had divided the city, human fates, minds and worldviews. The wall buil overnight – first as a barbed wire fence, later from concrete blocks more than three meters high.

10 Wojciech Orliński, *Lem. Życie nie z tej ziemi*. Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2017.

## Epilogue

On June 15th, 1961, a West German reporter asked the East German leader Walter Ulbricht about the rumours that East Germany is about to close the border in Berlin.

„Herr Chancellor, do you believe that the concept of free city requires to install a protected border wall by the Brandenburg Gate?"

Ulbricht didn't even blink:

"I have no information of any such plans. [...] No one at all is going to build any wall."

The wall was built of the 13th of August, 1961, and fell on the 9th of November, 1989. It was 155 km long and 3.6 m tall.

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