The legacy of the forty years of an authoritarian, centralised, paternalistic state system not only co-shaped the post-1989 era, but also largely determined its specific nature. The sphere of cultural production and reception, including books, was among the areas most deeply scarred by the past, and these ‘scars’ were not just obstacles to establishing some kind of new ‘post-revolutionary’ ideal institutional system, but were actually constitutive elements of post-1989 development. As already noted, prior to 1989, it was the sphere of state-controlled publishing and distribution that dominated the nation’s book scene, as none of the alternative spheres – samizdat, exile publishing, or used book sales – was able to fully take its place. Despite internal conflicts in the system it continued to serve as the major supplier of reading material for the majority of the population and became one of the main arenas for the upcoming turnover. It was then the sphere of official publishing that served as an institutional space into which the old (i.e. centralised, state, ‘censored’, etc.) book order collapsed and, in tandem with what remained of the alternative publishing spheres, began to produce books in the new (private, ‘free’, decentralised, etc.) system.

It was again the literary establishment and its disintegration that, as one of the publicly most visible arenas, in a way represented the transformation of the entire book world, and as such a brief summary of the key turning points is warranted. Members of the top political and literary establishment continued to reproduce the stubborn make-up of the given order virtually until the very last days of the ‘old regime’.1 Fears about the loss of certain privileges, such as access to prestigious posts, publishing opportunities, and above-standard honoraria, certainly served as incentives for the older generation to insist on the

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continuity of the established order, and also motivated the younger generation, who quickly learned to make the most of even mid-level positions in the complex power hierarchy. At the same time, however, alongside the literary establishment, alternative (though not necessarily oppositional) cultural activities, such as concerts by singer-songwriters, small-scale theatre productions in and outside Prague, and exhibitions of groups of visual artists continued to attract the attention of growing audiences due to the variety of these semi-official events. There also emerged a gradual tendency for interaction between figures in the illegal, dissident and underground intellectual circles, those located, or more precisely put tolerated, within official academic institutions, and those dedicated to culture and the arts. For example, in 1988, the literary critic and translator Miroslav Červenka launched an unofficial ‘evening university’, conceived as a series of lectures and seminars terminating in a degree that was conferred on students by universities abroad. This project embraced lecturers and tutors who had been expelled from academia after 1968 (Alexander Stich, Jiří Brabec) as well as some who lectured at Charles University (Jaroslava Janáčková, Věra Menclová). Moreover, students who enrolled in a university in the 1980s, and thus did not share the post-1968 fears and frustrations of their parents’ generation, were prepared to cross the boundaries between what was ‘banned’ and what was ‘permitted’.

Lectures and festivals organised under the formal supervision of the Youth Union (SSM), screenings of student work at FAMU, the Prague

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2 Among the songwriters who continually balanced at the edge between the permitted and banned existence was, for example, singer-songwriter, guitarist, poet, fiction writer and film director Vladimír Merta (*1946), singer-songwriter and poet Jakub Noha (*1950), singer-songwriter and fiction writer Vlastimil Třešňák (*1950), or to date the very popular singer-songwriter, composer and guitarist Jaromír Nohavica (*1953). Small-scale theatres included the Prague-based Studio Ypsilon, Činoherní klub, Semafor and Brno-based Hadivadlo and Divadlo na provázku. In the area of visual arts, the most active were Tvrdohlaví – a group of visual artists, photographers, illustrators, sculptors, stage designers and art glass designers who formally established themselves in 1987. Members included, for example, Jiří David (*1956), Petr Nikl (*1960), Zdeněk Lhotský (*1956), Jaroslav Róna (*1957) and František Skála (*1956), who all soon after 1989 were among the strongest and most visible actors of the post-1989 art scene. See “Politické a kulturní…” (2008), 44–56.

3 Without trying to turn this book into yet another memoir of an ‘East European intellectual’, I would like to use this opportunity and express my gratitude to both Dr. Jaroslava Janáčková and Dr. Věra Menclová, whom I was privileged to study under at Charles University, for the immense intellectual and moral strength they tirelessly showed both inside and outside the classroom.