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Timothy Barney
University of Richmond, tbarney@richmond.edu

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Václav Havel at the End of the Cold War: The Invention of Post-Communist Transition in the Address to U.S. Congress, February 21, 1990

by Timothy Barney

A mere three months after the peaceful Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, and less than a year after his last imprisonment under the communist regime, playwright-turned-president Vaclav Havel stood before a joint session of U.S. Congress in February of 1990. In his address, Havel marked, for his American audience, the new freedoms being established at home. More than just a victory lap, however, Havel's visit articulated the importance of the invention of post-communism, as the end of the Cold War had to be constructed for his global audience. Havel's version of invention in the speech used temporality and embodiment as key rhetorical materials—as he emphasized the opportune moment of the end of the Cold War, he also embodied the higher moral sense of responsibility and democratic civic culture that he believed the moment called for. However, this inventive process was understood differently by his American, European, and Czech audiences, and his attempts to transcend Cold War frames were highly contested. Havel thus became a complex symbol of the transition between the Cold War and the post-Cold War, which showed the tensions around the implementation of a “new world order.”

“Mr. President, you need to go to America. You will be a star” (Zantovsky, 2014, p. 353).

These were the words spoken by Shirley Temple Black to Václav Havel in January 1990, mere days after the Velvet Revolution swept Czechoslovakia and improbably brought Havel, the absurdist playwright-turned-political prisoner into Prague Castle as President. Temple Black, at that time the U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia, knew a few things about the value of celebrity in politics, and was well poised to understand the symbolic stakes of a visit from one of the perceived heroes of the so-called end of the Cold War. And so Havel and his team patched together what quickly ballooned into the largest entourage from a foreign state in United States history (outside of de Gaulle's trip to Washington in 1960), and featured concerts, art shows, a summit with other famous international playwrights, visits to human rights organizations, and a gala in New York featuring Paul Newman, Elie Wiesel, Barbara Walters, and Harry Belafonte (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 1990a). As Havel (2007) would say later in his autobiography,

This feeling of responsibility—together with my total lack of experience—obviously made me arrogant enough to talk to the most influential people on the planet with no sense of shyness, hesitation, or embarrassment, to present them with daring ideas or opportunities, to

deliver speeches on fundamental matters in parliaments, and so on, and in all this to maintain a smiling face and a certain ease. (p. 141)

The visit culminated in a speech to a joint session of U.S. Congress. The scene matched the surreal nature of Havel's own plays—the downtrodden, bewildered prisoner/artist, whose last arrest was merely five months before, now stands in front of one of the most powerful bodies in the world. There would be seventeen standing ovations during the speech. Shirley Temple Black was right: a star was born.

Outside of the celebrity spectacle of Havel's visit, though, the Congressional address itself remains a lasting monument to a breathless moment of transition. On one hand, the speech had a clearly instrumental purpose for Havel: to speak to what the United States could do for Czechoslovakia during a tumultuous move toward democratization. But the appeal was peculiar: this wasn't the request for financial aid, for example, that his Polish counterpart, Lech Walesa, had made a few months before (Walesa, 1989). No, Havel's "ask" was "How can the United States of America help us today? My reply is as paradoxical as the whole of my life has been: you can help us most of all if you help the Soviet Union on its irreversible, but immensely complicated, road to democracy" (Havel, 1990a, para 22). Havel appealed to the United States to realize its responsibility to ensure the safe and democratic end to the Soviet Union as we knew it. Even more peculiar was that Havel deliberately split his speech into two parts: one that was political, and one that was philosophical. At one point, Havel even pronounced to the members of Congress that "Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human humbleness and in human responsibility" (Havel, 1990a, para 38-39). The ensuing lecture on moral responsibility on a global scale, it is safe to say, was not the kind of rhetoric that Congress was accustomed to hearing, although they seemingly approved of the message. The *Washington Post's* editorial sardonically

needed Congress' rapturous response: "Mr. Havel's audience, having for the most part not the vaguest idea of what he was talking about, *could* tell who was on the other side and thus were simply saying 'Take that, Karl, you old fool!'" (Washington Post, 1990a). A later letter to the *Post's* editors joked that, "Congress was obviously itching to break for lunch when it applauded so heartily upon hearing Václav Havel proclaim that 'nacho chips precede beans'" (Washington Post, 1990b).

Congress' ability to understand Heideggerian philosophy aside, that sense of the audience members and their appropriation of Havel's vision is key to understanding the address. My main argument revolves around the idea that, in Havel's case, the post-Cold War landscape had to be *invented* for his audiences; it didn't somehow just exist after the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, or even the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. Rhetorical theorist and critic Peter Simonson (2014) has defined invention broadly as "the generation of rhetorical materials" (p. 313). In this case, rhetorical materials for the post-Cold War transition had to be generated. A new ideological framework by which to make sense out of the world had to be creatively built and maintained through rhetoric, and Havel's Congressional address provided one important exemplar of that creation and maintenance at the end of the Cold War.

Simonson clarified his simple definition of invention by noting that "Generation can occur through finding, creating, assembling, translating, recombining, channeling or giving form to. *Rhetorical materials* are then the symbolic and physical elements that enter into or are gathered for the purpose of communicative address....Rhetorical materials included invention's traditional words, ideas, and arguments but also stories, styles, gestures, rituals, bodily deportments, emotions, images, objects, and the dynamic matter that gathers itself into 'things' that contribute to the dynamic flow of rhetorical production" (p. 313). In his Congressional address, Havel attempted to "give form" to the end of the Cold War and its aftermath by inventing an idea of what moral responsibility and civic character looks like (or should look like) in this new era. He employed two key inventional resources:

1) temporality, as Havel called attention to the specific opportunity of the moment to chart a new post-Cold War course, and the responsibility to capitalize on that moment; and 2) embodiment, in the sense of a combination of Havel's references to his own body and experience, and the body and experiences of the larger Czech nation. Havel invoked the speed and acceleration of world events and answered that the only way to cope with them was to take both political and moral action. He then used himself as a symbol of this action, thus becoming an embodiment of the transition from the Cold War to the so-called post-Cold War. Together, these inventional resources of time and embodiment allowed Havel to position his own improbable presence as prisoner-turned-president, and by extension the Czechoslovakians' own improbable journey out of communism, as a kind of symbolic potential for what post-Cold War democracy could be.

But such an invention had its limits. To be expected, there were different visions than Havel's as to how the new post-Cold War era should be invented. As critiques of Havel's speech and larger presidential persona made clear, his vision of the post-Cold War order as a place of moral reflection and responsibility was contested and/or read differently by his audiences. As much as Havel was trying to invent what he called "a new family of man" after the fall of state socialism, the reality was more complex. Much of his American audience, for example, saw a triumphalism of U.S. ideals winning the Cold War and may have missed the moral nuances of the speech, while some of his global critics saw a subservience to U.S. power and a moral self-righteousness that neglected the material problems the Cold War and its aftermath created. Invention, as Simonson notes, is not something that simply encompasses the "new" by a single agent, nor can it be fully controlled by them; it is rather a social process that builds on past discourses, often reproducing, repeating, and recasting older ideas and narratives. Havel was not creatively generating an entirely new post-Cold War landscape, then, but was a conduit that was re-circulating "ideological commonplaces" too (Simonson, 2014, p. 312). The speech, for example, both repudiated the static nature of familiar Cold

War frameworks while still upholding some of their problematic assumptions of so-called East and West. In making these kinds of rhetorical moves, Havel's speech pointed to the tensions of his U.S. audience and his global audience, and their different hopes and fears. Out of Havel's invention comes a speech that, I contend, should be part of a new (or at least revised) canon of Cold War discourses that begins to look at how the conflict's assumptions are perceived, appropriated, and transformed by important global rhetorical actors outside of the long conflict's two superpowers.

Grounding Havel in the Rhetorical Tradition

To begin with, Havel must be situated within the body of scholarship studying him from a rhetorical perspective. This previous research provides an important foundation on which to build an argument about his use of invention for a post-Cold War political landscape. In 1993, Thomas B. Farrell used Havel's famed New Year's Day speech (his first as president) as an example of a "critical interruption," which upended the expected norms of public discourse that had been prevalent under communist rule (p. 258). Farrell established that

rhetoric may be able to generate new dimensions of practical consciousness while working within the received opinions, appearances, and conventions of everyday life. This inventional process...typically involves an intersection between the rhetorical speaker's suggested interpretative horizon and the audience's received opinions, cultural norms, or encounter conventions and rules. Given the capacity of rhetoric to range over previous utterance episodes for its topics, themes, and proofs, it is possible for a kind of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, to emerge in this sudden joining of otherwise distinct perspectives and horizons. (p. 257)

Farrell found that Havel created this kind of practical wisdom by attempting to revive a sense of civic culture that had been denied for generations under communism. He encouraged a "participatory public *sense*" and a "collective authorship" where all shared in the blame for communism, but also

shared in the triumph of a new democratic civic habit (p. 267; p. 272). Through examples like Havel, Farrell noted that “we may now appreciate the way in which rhetorical practice may itself be inventional. Although it always relies on what *appears*, as inflected by received opinions and convention, it may also recombine and individuate these so as to *interrupt* the quotidian of ordinary policy and practice” (p. 273). In other words, Havel was drawing on his audience’s unique experiences under totalitarian communism, and inventively transforming them into a productive site for a new civic culture that all were responsible for protecting. Farrell’s use of Havel as an example of such invention is important to analyzing the U.S. Congressional address because it shows the ways Havel sought to disrupt that status quo of the Cold War and consciously inaugurate a new era. He recognized the moment as opportune for inventional possibilities.

Other rhetorical scholars have found Havel to be an important transitional figure who represents a point of departure from traditional ways of using public memory and from the strictures of Cold War thinking. Bradford Vivian (2009) analyzed the New Year’s Day speech by Havel and wrote that “Havel’s message is an unconventional appeal for solidarity: what we have done to ourselves we may be inspired to undo, and be duly praised for it” (p.86). Like Farrell, Vivian found the novelty in Havel’s extension of responsibility to all for totalitarianism, and noted how forgiveness could be “the foundation of a new state.” This approach recognized a “common humanity rather than an excuse for denying others’ human rights,” thus offering a new way of understanding rhetoricity in a post-Cold War world. For Vivian, Havel showed the importance of “creating a functionally unified political identity in periods of conflict resolution and political transformation” (p. 87). While not invoking invention directly, Vivian acknowledged Havel’s role in symbolizing the transition to a different civic culture after communism and how Havel consciously had to build a cohesive identity out of a fragmented political landscape. Kenneth Zagacki (1996) similarly pointed to the ways in which Havel interpreted the post-Cold War moment by synthesizing rhetorical materials and

fashioning an identity previously unavailable to, or hidden by, communist political culture. Zagacki found Havel's rhetoric during this transitional era both bold and profound: "Bold because he assumed the difficult task of defining, to both Czechs and Westerners in general, the direction of the post-cold war world in a way that avoided the *realpolitik* of many political spokespersons. Profound because Havel encouraged an unusual reversal of thinking about the new world order and the role of citizens within it" (p. 17). That reversal was based on what Zagacki termed a "rhetoric of folly," where Havel acknowledged the faults of human nature and used an ironic sensibility to show a move "toward hopeful human action" (p. 17).

Zagacki invoked the notion of a "new world order," an important term to highlight when discussing Havel. Rhetorical critics such as Roy Joseph, Thomas Kane, and Mary E. Stuckey have written about the new world order from a U.S. standpoint. Joseph (2006) saw it as based in President George H.W. Bush's conviction that the post-Cold War order would be a coalition with the United Nations based on shared democratic values, while Kane (1991) emphasized Bush's claim that the new world order would be largely an economic framework, one that proselytizes the values of an American-led global free market. Mary E. Stuckey (1995) situated the new world order as one, but not the only, organizing foreign policy "drama" for post-Cold War presidents, featuring rhetoric that emphasized the United States and other nations as moral equals on the world stage. The sense of morality implicit in U.S. presidential rhetoric around the new world order was made much more universal and broad in Havel's version, and understandably less focused on U.S. leadership. Based on his experiences as a dissident building an underground civil society, Havel differed from Bush in his invention of the new world order, elevating the importance of a post-Cold War worldwide democratic civic culture over security structures and markets.

Robert Hariman's work (1995) has outlined how actors like Havel have used a "republican style" to create such a civic culture. As Hariman wrote,

This conception of political life celebrates self-government as the highest moral calling, insists that citizens' political activities should be motivated and guided by civic virtues....These precepts in turn require that public institutions (such as the legislature), public practices (such as the practice of oratory), and public figures (such as the president) cultivate a moral sense in the citizenry that would result in decisions being made primarily with regard to the common good. (p. 96)

Hariman concluded that, "the stability of the republic through time depends on its ability to cultivate individuals possessing this virtuous character" (p. 96). Hariman noted Havel's emphasis on this performance of civic character through his presidential rhetoric in the form of "good taste" as a democratic virtue. A finely honed sense of decorum followed from this style, and leaders like Havel offered what they saw as the "correct" and ethical way to uphold "the traditions and prospects of the community" (p. 126). In addition, timing becomes a key consideration of the republican style, as Hariman wrote, "This idea of ethical performance....will of course include judgments of principle, obligation, honor, and the like, but these concepts will be epitomized by making the right gesture at the right time" (p. 127). Hariman's example of Havel is instructive because it can situate the Congressional speech in an inventional process of creating a new virtuous civic character during democratization and can demonstrate the importance of manipulating time for an opportune post-Cold War moment.

My essay deepens and extends these previous rhetorical studies of Havel by specifically situating the Congressional speech as emblematic of the difficulties of a larger transitional era in liberal democratic politics, an era of which the United States was an important part. I analyze a speech that includes a broader audience (like U.S. leaders) than some of the previous Havel studies and focus specifically on the context of the geopolitical rapprochement between the East and West that Havel found himself having to articulate.ⁱ Many of these previous studies highlight the

opportunities Havel created in the post-Cold War era, while focusing less on the limitations that he faced. Instead, I examine Havel's inventional rhetoric, keeping in mind the tensions that Havel encountered as he tried to embody a virtuous democratic character in a fraught and complicated era. These tensions are seen in the different appropriations, critiques, and responses to Havel in the wake of the Congressional visit, explored at the end of this article. Perhaps Hariman gets closest to the limitations of Havel's invention when he discusses the potential for "overbearing civic righteousness" in his rhetoric (p. 122). That kind of righteousness, for example, could not "ensure the survival of the republic," as Hariman put it, particularly as the fragmentation of nationalisms in Czechoslovakia, amongst other factors, contributed to the nation's split (p. 137). Similarly, his attempts to rethink the post-Cold War order came up against the realist calculations of national security that preoccupied the United States in the age of the new world order. Moral pronouncements about civic character vied against the material problems of the Cold War's aftermath. Havel's inventive rhetoric exemplifies the fragility of the "republic" in the new world after communism, and the difficulties of preparing politically and morally for transition.

The Transitional Context of the Trip to Washington

This is not the space to fully rehearse the events of the so-called Velvet Revolution and Havel's role within them, but a brief recounting of the main timeline helps establish just how Havel found himself standing before Congress in February of 1990. The roots of the Velvet Revolution stretch back to the memories of the Prague Spring of 1968, wherein attempts to reform socialism resulted in an invasion of Soviet tanks to brutally crush the new movement. A period of "normalization" followed, where the communist authorities cracked down harder on dissidents and suppressed any kind of civic culture. During normalization, Havel's successful career as a playwright who highlighted the absurdity of the totalitarian system took a more overtly political turn, as he turned to writing underground letters and essays during the 1970s. Crucially, he joined and became

an important leader of the Charter 77 movement, which directly challenged the government to uphold the human rights promises of the 1975 Helsinki Act and demanded reform of the social system. After a public furor over the Charter, Havel received a four-year prison sentence, and he quickly became a symbol of the dissident underground not just for Czechoslovakia, but for all of Eastern Europe under Soviet influence (Bradley, 1992; Shepherd, 2000; and Whipple, 1991).

After a period of more police harassment and prison time in the 1980s, events for Havel and the dissident underground began to move fast at the end of the decade. In August 1988, the twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion saw 10,000 people at a Prague demonstration, the largest since the Prague Spring, and a celebration of the anniversary of the 1918 declaration of the republic of Czechoslovakia took place in October, both ending in tear gas and mass arrests. Havel was arrested in January 1989 for laying flowers at the grave of Jan Palach, a dissident who set himself on fire in 1969 in protest against normalization. He would remain imprisoned for four months while Eastern Europe broke out into revolution—Poland saw a negotiated move to free elections, Hungary dismantled the border of the Iron Curtain, and the Wall was breached in Berlin. For Czechoslovakia, though, the Revolution would be the fastest of all (Bradley, 1992; Shepherd, 2000; and Whipple, 1991).

When 100,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square on November 18, in a peaceful demonstration commemorating the death of fascism, a breakout of beatings by the government led to a chaotic series of events. The symbolism of this violence on a day celebrating the end of fascism, combined with the Western media images of Eastern European neighbors revolting, made for an inevitable split with the communist government. Civic Forum, an aggregation of students, workers, and intellectuals, was formed two days after the event, with Havel quickly becoming its leader, and by November 30, Havel and the Civic Forum had their first direct talks with the communist government. With threats of more strikes and demonstrations, the ruling cabinet left by December 10,

marking the first time since 1948 that communists were a minority in the government. The communists announced a suspension of all party activity and a Federal Assembly was convened to temporarily hold order. By December 29, 1989, the Assembly had unanimously elected Vaclav Havel as the president of the new Czechoslovak Republic. Within two days, the playwright would be at the podium trying to make sense out of a momentous turn of events, mere weeks after being a political prisoner (Bradley, 1992; Shepherd, 2000; and Whipple, 1991).

Although Havel expressed bewilderment and bemusement about his acceptance of leadership, several biographers have deconstructed the narrative that Havel was simply swept up in the events and somehow ended up in the Castle. Rather, these writers emphasize that Havel knew how to work quickly and confidently with political savvy, given his background in the organization of Charter 77, and he exploited those skills to turn protests into viable, peaceful negotiations with the communist government (Goetz-Stankiewicz and Carey, 1999; Keane, 1999; Zantovsky, 2014). But even more so, he well understood that his renown as artist, political thinker, and dissident gave him the symbolic capital to embody the principles of democratization for his transitioning nation. As he said to Czechs and Slovaks in the aforementioned New Year's Address, "We are a small country, yet at one time we were the spiritual crossroads of Europe. Is there a reason why we could not again become one?" (Havel, 1990b).

Arguably, this project to become such a crossroads would consume Havel's vision of executive leadership. Given the limited power of the presidency in Czechoslovakia to enact meaningful domestic change, Havel's more ceremonial responsibilities found their fullest voice in his appeals on foreign policy and the return of the Czech and Slovak nations to both Europe and the world (Havel, 1999; Wolchik, 1997; Cepl and Gillis, 1993). Havel often looked back at the breathless first two years of his presidency and remarked on just how much power he was able to gain by sheer will and personality alone—by the letter of the law, he was certainly outstripping what his

constitutional role was (Havel, 1993). In a sense, his symbolic potential to invent a post-Cold War civic culture was the hallmark of his presidential power. As political scientist Dean C. Hammer (1999) has written, “Half a century of Soviet control had left a previously vibrant Czechoslovakian state with neither a constitutional framework nor political and civil habits upon which to build a democratic society” (p. 149). Certainly, Havel sought to be a guarantor of free and fair elections and oversee a constitutional restructuring, but it was in the invention of what he saw as the correct “political and civil habits” where his early presidential rhetoric pointed.

Shortly after the New Year’s Day speech, the Bush Administration invited Havel and his team to come to America. Speaker of the House Tom Foley also asked if Havel would address a joint session of U.S. Congress. The symbolic worth of such a trip was seen as high for both sides, and soon the whole visit came together. Michael Zantovsky (2014), Havel’s press director, wrote that “pandemonium broke out....There was little knowledge about the protocol, the etiquette, or the politics of DC. Nobody in the office had seen the real America for twenty years” (p. 353). The sense of a closed, walled-off country now open brought both trepidation and excitement. Many who have reflected on those early months after the revolution noted the acceleration of time and the sheer absurdity of a very recent political prisoner leading a cabinet comprising not political professionals, but outsider dissidents in their own right (Whipple, 1991). Havel (2007) himself reflected later: “As far as the trip to America is concerned: it was full of improvisation; professionals plan such journeys months in advance, and we amateurs had about two weeks to do it” (p. 141). In terms of the Congressional speech itself, Havel noted, “Very few know, however, that I had to write that speech in a single afternoon—I had no more time for it then, and I did not seriously consult anyone about it; I think only my closest colleagues read it” (p. 142).

When the details were settled and the schedule set for Washington D.C. and New York, Havel was off to America for February 20-23 of 1990. But before the speech on the 21st could take place,

Havel had to get through his first meeting with President Bush the day before. The ensuing conversation between Bush and Havel provides a window into Havel's inventional process leading up to the Congressional speech, and shows the pragmatic and rhetorical challenges that Havel faced in navigating Czechoslovakia's "return to Europe" and the world at large. These kinds of exchanges were emblematic of the difficulties Havel faced as a political dissident turned head of state. As a recently declassified memo of the conversation between Havel and Bush demonstrates, Havel tried to advance the notion that NATO needed rethinking, and in return got a little bit of a lecture from the U.S. President on the issue of security. Havel began by telling the president that he wanted an expanded role of the Helsinki commission to help foster security and bilateralism in Europe. He also appealed to Bush for help in moving the Soviet Union toward peaceful democratization, saying that,

It is perhaps not so strongly felt in the U.S. as in my country, but we have a strong feeling that the process of the destruction of totalitarian systems is irreversible for the U.S.S.R. as well as for Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union, the process is much more complicated and may take a number of dramatic turns, but it is historically irreversible. For history, there is no going back. (National Security Archive, 1990a, p. 2)

Bush wasn't so sure, telling Havel with his customary caution:

'Historically irreversible change' is what you call what is going on in the Soviet Union. I hope you're right and have no reason to argue the point, but the problems facing Mr. Gorbachev are extraordinarily difficult....Our view, my Administration's view, is that we shouldn't withdraw and declare peace. We shouldn't decouple or delink ourselves from Europe....We want to see a continued evolution of freedom wherever it is denied and want to see, in a broad philosophical sense, self-determination, and we want to see stability. It is in the interest of the U.S. to see a stable Europe 'whole and free.' So when we talk about a continued role for

NATO, we are not speaking of a Maginot Line across Europe, but a revised agenda, a political agenda, for NATO and a stabilizing U.S. presence. (National Security Archive, 1990b, p. 4)

Bush's vision still included a strong NATO and U.S. presence in Europe, and Havel seemed to realize that he might have to walk his comments back a bit, saying to the U.S. President,

I believe I may have been misunderstood. I do think there is no doubt about the stabilizing role of the U.S. and NATO at the present time. There is no doubt in the Soviet Union either.

But I would just point out that the world is changing. NATO may be transformed into part of a new security system comprising all of the CSCE [U.S. Helsinki Commission] countries,

with a continuing U.S. role. But history is going so fast that some day your troops may return to their mothers, though not all at once. (National Security Archive, 1990a, p. 4)

Havel wanted to make clear that he saw the U.S. role as centrally important, but as a rhetorician sensitive to symbols and optics, he articulated that NATO troops and apparatuses sent the wrong message that force was still the way to oversee transitional change in Europe. For his part, Bush conceded the idea that NATO was changing, but proceeded cautiously in offering any assurances—the fact that nothing concrete came of these exchanges, beyond the building of trust between the two leaders, showed that Bush found Havel's ideas on the post-Cold War landscape to be naïve. The Bush conversation was part of an important political education for Havel, where he saw the intricacies of geopolitics in practice, and rubbed up against the rigidity of global Cold War frameworks and the communicative limitations of superpower politics. And as he stood in front of Congress the next day, he would have to strike the difficult balance between the hard calculations of a world leader and the grand theoretical notions of a political thinker.

Inventing an Era of Multipolarity in the Speech to Congress

In Peter Simonson's view (2014), invention “organizes and materializes itself through a range of media that can be distinguished analytically but that deeply intersect in practice” (p. 314). While

Simonson provides an exhaustive list of what such media could entail, the most relevant ones to Havel's inventional work in the Congressional address include 1) *bodies*, which are "the persistent medium for human invention as a practice; they en flesh and provide the conditions of possibility for minds, sensations, emotions, and experiences"; 2) *experience*, which ranges "from clearly demarcated events to experience as accumulated over time and organizing itself in habits" and also "underwrites all manners of invention understood as a lived process, event, and pedagogically cultivated art"; and 3) *time*, which is "both immediate and historical, each culturally mediated, but also presenting their own kinds of habitats and materials for invention; the home of *kairos* as a regulative concept" (p. 314). As Simonson noted, these media are not always distinct in discourse, but rather intersect together in meaningful ways. In Havel's case, it was the combination of timing and embodiment (through body and experience) that became the inventional resources for his attempt to create a shared democratic culture in the twilight of the Cold War. He emphasized the dramatic temporality of the moment, particularly the hurried pace of change, but also invoked past Czech experiences as rhetorical material to create civic habits in the present time. He then drew on his own bodily presence as a former prisoner who sacrificed himself for democratic principles and was now en fleshed as a president speaking in front of one of the world's most iconic bodies of legislature. This reference to himself and his experience, as well as the experience of the larger Czechoslovakian nation, allowed Havel to embody what a post-communist transition could look like.

Temporality as Inventional Medium in the Congressional Speech

Given Simonson's emphasis on time as a key mediator of rhetorical invention, it is no wonder that Havel framed the opening of his speech in terms of the sheer, often absurd march of time and the rapid turns of world (and personal) events. As his frequent translator Paul Wilson (1997) wrote, "The early speeches reflect his sense of bewilderment and wonder at the quickened pace of history that swept the old order out and ushered him and his colleagues into office," and the Congressional

speech is representative in this regard (p. xiii). He opened the speech by noting that his last arrest on October 27 was a mere four months earlier, and “didn’t know whether it was for two days or two years” (Havel, 1990a, para 2). Prison time, for Havel, had its own unpredictable rhythm, ultimately controlled by the whims of totalitarian governance. This added even more to the sense of compression that Havel was attempting to build. Havel then says:

On the 10th of December 1989, when my actor friend Jiri Bartoska, in the name of the Civic Forum, nominated me as a candidate for the office of the president of the republic, I thought it was out of the question that the Parliament we had inherited from the previous regime would elect me. Twelve days later, when I was unanimously elected president of my country, I had no idea that in two months I would be speaking in front of this famous and powerful assembly, and that I would be heard by millions of people who have never heard of me.

(Havel, 1990a, para 3-4)

So Havel, working in terms of months to weeks to days in the beginning of the speech dramatized this movement, so much that he stops the forward acceleration of this time by pausing and saying, “It is all very extraordinary indeed” (Havel, 1990a, para 6).

Havel invented one of his main roles in the speech as the interpreter of what he called the sheer “velocity of the changes” of 1989 (Havel, 1990a, para 10). The heightening of speed allowed him to mark the extraordinary nature of the transition out of Cold War, which at forty-plus years, became the very definition of a static frame, no matter how much change happened within that frame. As he memorably said “none of the familiar political speedometers are adequate” to measure how fast events have moved (Havel, 1990a, para 8). Kenneth Zagacki (1996) wrote that “Havel expressed the folly, unacknowledged by the Communists, of assuming that history can be completely controlled. So listeners were left with Havel’s temperized stand as a warning about future democratic change. They were encouraged to celebrate the new, fertile democratic time, but to recognize that such moments

pass quickly from sight” (p. 21). Havel’s “temperized stand” was evident, for example, in his discussion of Gorbachev and perestroika, when he said to Congress,

Apparently they too had no idea what they were setting in motion or how rapidly events would unfold. We knew a great deal about the enormous number of growing problems that slumbered beneath the honeyed, unchanging mask of socialism. But I don’t think any of us knew how little it would take for these problems to manifest themselves in all their enormity, and for the longings of these nations to emerge in all their strength. The mask fell away so rapidly that, in the flood of work, we have had literally no time to be astonished. (Havel, 1990a, para 17)

Havel’s persona was more strategic here than just one of befuddlement and bewilderment; he needed to inventively juxtapose the new sense of temporality (one of unstoppable change) against the old (one of “unchanging” slumber) in order to later reference its fragility and its need to be guarded. This allowed him to periodize the new era into a distinct communist past and post-communist present, declaring that the new “era of multipolarity” had created a “historically irreversible process” of change away from the frightening stability of Cold War bipolarity (Havel, 1990a, para 18).

Havel believed the so-called East was formerly operating on a different kind of time under totalitarianism, and needed to catch up to liberal democracy’s time. For example, he referred to democracy as an unending “horizon,” something that “can never be fully attained.” The horizon was a striking image, making democracy into a kind of active, restless search rather than a finished state. He then complimented his American audience by saying:

you have one great advantage: you have been approaching democracy uninterruptedly for more than 200 years, and your journey toward that horizon has never been disrupted by a totalitarian system. Czechs and Slovaks, despite their humanistic traditions that go back to the

first millennium, have approached democracy for a mere twenty years, between the two world wars....” (Havel, 1990a, para 31)

Democracy and temporality were tied together—totalitarianism was disruption, brutal and long to be sure, but only a disruption on the journey toward democracy.

In the speech’s reference to a totalitarian past, it was clear that while the emphasis on newness and change was key to the speech, so was its use of history and collective memory. Havel’s address showed his belief that the consequence of 1989 was not the “end of history,” a concept that was in vogue at the time, which many commentators used to declare the victory of liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989). For Havel, history was, in fact, beginning again, and that required a reconciliation with the past itself, not an uncritical triumphalism. Rhetorical critic Noemi Marin (2006) has noted how historical materials were an important source of invention for post-communist leaders, as history provided a “normative vocabulary, loci of legitimacy, and relocation of political voice...” to shape new national and international identities (p. 217). Havel drew on such vocabulary, as he remarked that “for many years, Czechoslovakia as someone’s meaningful satellite has refused to face up honestly to its co-responsibility for the world....If I dwell on this...it is only because I feel along with my fellow citizens a sense of culpability for our former reprehensible passivity and a rather ordinary sense of indebtedness” (Havel, 1990a, para 27). This was more than simple humility towards his powerful American audience—Havel was promising that an airing of moral responsibility would become part of the post-communist landscape as much as market economies would. Democratization had to account for the reality of citizens’ complicity with former totalitarian regimes and other painful collective memories of 1938, 1948, and 1968, and those memories haunt the speech.

But in his reference to “humanistic traditions” that stretch back many centuries, Havel was reminding his audience that he wasn’t just calling for a dwelling on difficult times in Czech history. Rather, Havel was trying to invent a democratic and civic habit for his various audiences that may

have existed in the past, but needed to be recreated for the new era (Barney, 2015a). Political scientist Delia Popescu (2012) has written that “Havel’s effort to emphasize the significance of responsibility can be characterized as a work of retrieval: the retrieval of higher values from the ‘pre-modern past,’ a past where they still had meaning” (p. 84). So rather than just the modern or even post-modern president that many have labeled Havel, he was just as ready to reach back to a more distant tradition before democracy—that being a dormant sense of responsibility, a civic habit that could be reawakened. Overall, then, the invention of temporality in the speech dramatically heightened the stakes of the moment and made a break from the past, but also made important continuities with elements of that past that were still usable. How he and Czechs could model the new civic habits marked the next major source of invention in the speech.

Embodiment as Inventional Medium in the Congressional Address

In the heart of the address, Havel added to his focus on opportune time and the pacing of change by emphasizing his own body and experiences, and then those of the Czechoslovakian nation. He drew on these inventional sites to demonstrate how he embodied the principles needed for the new era. This marked the more philosophical aspect of the address, as distinct from the more political aspect, where he asked his Congressional audience to consider the importance of concrete items like troop reductions and withdrawals in Europe, the acceleration of the Helsinki processes, and the need for the United States to help the Soviet Union move swiftly and surely toward democracy. These were more traditional realist political appeals, eloquently posed but essentially expected after the tumult of an epochal set of revolutions and reunifications. But the more philosophical part of the speech was built on articulating how he and Czechoslovakians could embody a sense of moral responsibility. While indeed Havel recognized the enormous responsibility that the United States and the Soviet Union had, the speech was more notable for the weight it placed on himself and the

shoulders of the post-communist nations and how he implicated all of his audiences as equally accountable for the stewardship of the new era.

To invent this civic culture of responsibility, Havel had to first define his own sense of responsibility and make his own body, personality, and experience symbolic of the triumph over communism. In the speech, Havel, for example, noted that “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve only been president for two months, and I haven’t attended any schools for presidents. My only school was life itself” (Havel, 1990a, para 2). That his own life story, and thus by implication his own suffering body in prison, gave him the legitimacy to speak on politics and power in the Cold War transition was important. Havel extrapolated that personal suffering to reach that of his whole nation’s. In fact, the crux of the speech revolved around not just what the West could teach the East about economies and political structures, but what the East could actually teach the West, which was the special value of experiencing totalitarianism first hand. As Havel said,

The Communist type of totalitarian system has left both our nations, Czechs and Slovaks, as it has all the nations of the Soviet Union, and the other countries the Soviet Union subjugated in its time a legacy of countless dead, an infinite spectrum of human suffering, profound economic decline, and above all enormous human humiliation. It has brought us horrors that fortunately you have not known. At the same time, however unintentionally, of course it has given us something positive: a special capacity to look, from time to time, somewhat further than someone who has not undergone this bitter experience. A person who cannot move and live a normal life because he is trapped by a boulder has more time to think about his hopes than someone who is not trapped in this way. (Havel, 1990a, para 33-34)

Havel’s pronouncement that the so-called East was in a position to teach the West was perhaps the most profound contribution of the speech—not only could he educate his American audience about his own journey and his nation’s journey, the Czechs, Slovaks, and even by extension Poles,

Hungarians, and others had moral advantages that Americans did not have. As Havel's conversations with Bush demonstrated, making that contribution in practice was difficult, but the speech itself did look toward inventing a future where the small and weak could influence the large and the strong.

The unspoken connection here, that Havel's own humiliation in prison is tantamount to the humiliation of an entire class of nations, undergirded the speech. In much of his presidential rhetoric both at home and abroad, Havel would parallel his own improbable trajectory with that of the Czechoslovak body politic itself. The sense of responsibility that he felt for stewarding his nation back to the world was to be modeled for his audiences. The transition from dissident to world leader was made complete here, as democratization called Havel to public service on a global scale. As Aviezer Tucker (2000) writes, "the new element in Havel's speech to Congress is his perception of his vocation and distinction as president in listening to this call of conscience, and sounding it in politics" (p. 178). Havel referred to this conscience when he said,

If I subordinate my political behavior to this imperative, I can't go far wrong. If on the contrary I were not guided by this voice, not even 10 presidential schools with 2,000 of the best political scientists in the world could help me. This is why I ultimately decided after resisting for a long time to accept the burden of political responsibility. (Havel, 1990a, para 43-45)

The revision of the Cincinnatus myth in politics was on display here—rather than a farmer laying down his plow in sacrifice to serve the republic, the intellectual lays down his pen and agrees to take up the call of democratic politics.

This section of the speech also houses Havel's often-cheered and often-mocked phrase, the idea that "consciousness precedes Being." Here, the more realist geopolitical calculations of the earlier part of the speech about the Cold War's end now turned to a more existential view of the demise of the bipolar system. Perhaps more bewildering for his Congressional audience than

“consciousness precedes Being” was the fact that Havel did not choose to declare a Cold War triumph. Instead, he implicated both East and West as responsible for the wreckage, especially morally and spiritually, of the Cold War. He warned that

If we are no longer threatened by a world war, or by the danger that the absurd mountains of accumulated nuclear weapons might blow up the world, this does not mean that we have definitely won. We are in fact far from definite victory. We are still a long way from that ‘family of man’; in fact, we seem to be receding from the ideal rather than drawing closer to it. Interests of all kinds: personal, selfish, state, national, group and, if you like, company interests still considerably outweigh genuinely common and global interests. (Havel, 1990a, para 40-41)

He went on to decry the environmental destruction, “social, ethnic, and cultural conflicts,” and “anonymous megamachinery” that not just the end of the Cold War brings but that modern life has brought in general (Havel, 1990a, para 41). The point of this airing of modern grievances came back to moral responsibility, or as he said, “responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success. Responsibility to the order of Being, where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged” (Havel, 1990a, para 42). Havel was an avowed nonbeliever in God, but he would invoke a higher power often in his discourse, as a kind of covenant that the sinning populace could come back to (Putna, 2010). The unspoken implication of this approach is that Havel served as the embodiment of that higher responsibility, demonstrating it for his audiences in action in the speech.

Finally, Havel did not bill himself as the answer to the crises he names, but he did offer his own acceptance of the call to political action as a model. He said,

When Thomas Jefferson wrote that ‘Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the Consent of the Governed,’ it was a simple and important act of the

human spirit. What gave meaning to that act, however, was the fact that the author backed it up with his life. It was not just his words, but his deeds as well. (Havel, 1990a, para 49-50)

Implicit here is that Havel was guaranteeing democratic transition with his life. In one sense, this referred again to Havel's embodiment of post-communism as someone who literally put his (imprisoned) body on the line to fight for democracy. In another sense, it was a prescriptive appeal to nations in transition suggesting that they had to embody democracy and its principles and not just talk about them, with the close of the speech being, "I will end where I began. History has accelerated. I believe that once again, it will be the human spirit that will notice this acceleration, give it a name, and transform those words into deeds" (Havel, 1990a, para 51). The twin themes of temporality and embodiment were thus united rhetorically as Havel ended the address.

Altogether, in the speech, Havel invented himself as the representative of the vicissitudes of the Cold War—both its entrenchment and its dissolution, but also its aftermath. Havel's improbable story, as he so often referred back to, was inextricable from the temporal rhythms of the Cold War and the second half of the twentieth century, his life following the post-WWII split of East and West and their momentous but rocky reunification. As David S. Danaher (2015) has written, "Havel's restructuring of the conventional Cold War dichotomy emerges from his belief that the twentieth century represents the dawn of a transitional era in human history, a shift from one great age of humanity—the Modern Age, with its implicit faith in rationality and science—to another age that is beginning to take shape but that has yet to define itself fully. Humanity is in the throes of redefining itself, searching for a new self-understanding" (p. 140). To move towards redefinition, Havel rhetorically invented himself into both the conscience of his nation, and that of the conscience of the post-Cold War moment, or at least the transitional moment, and that had its consequences. The reception and legacy of the speech has marked such consequences in stark terms.

Contested Visions of the Post-Cold War in the Reception of the Congressional Address

The varied reactions to Havel's address evidence just how contested the invention of the post-Cold War order could be. Of course, the speech's immediate reception seemed to be one of unqualified success. Zantovsky (2014) recalled that as Havel met with members of both houses after the speech, he was mobbed by well-wishers and friendly Congress members asking for more clarification on what he meant by "consciousness precedes Being" (p. 359). Czech-American director Milos Forman (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Amadeus*) told the *New York Times* after the speech, "I was very moved, which disturbed me, because I am proud of learning to be tough. I was confused from emotions that I thought are no longer inside of me. I did not think I could be touched and moved by anything that has to do with politics" (Rimer, 1990). At a large gala later that evening at St. John the Divine in New York City, Elie Wiesel said to the gathering there that, "Tonight I wish I could speak in Czech. Tonight I wish I were Czech. Tonight in your presence we are all Czech" (Rimer, 1990). At a press conference, Havel chalked the success of the speech and the visit up to some concrete accomplishments, as he told Prague TV,

Well, experience shows that whenever a country somehow enters the consciousness of a given society, a given country, and when personal contacts are forged at the highest level, this automatically has the result of producing various offers and possibilities for economic and cultural cooperation. We several times pointed out the areas in which we would most appreciate certain offers, and since we repeated all this several times no doubt it will stick in people's minds and be translated into specific deeds and a genuine revitalization of cooperation with the United States. (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 1990d, p. 9)

Beyond the immediate reception though, the legacy of the speech, and really Havel's entire body of presidential discourse, has become a fertile ground for debate on the meaning of the end of the Cold War and the invention of its aftermath. As Zagacki (1996) wrote later of the Congressional speech, "[Havel] thereby sought to reclaim for himself and his audience a lost world and its gentler

virtues of humility, compassion, and moral responsibility. These virtues in turn provide the commonplaces of Havel's speeches, and work to overcome the anxiety of his audiences during a time of political unrest and possibility" (p. 18). By trying to overcome that anxiety, though, Havel risked becoming a repository of post-communist hopes and affirmations—a kind of cipher for Western elites, particularly American leaders who were trying to articulate U.S. triumph in the Cold War. Arizona Senator Jeff Flake (2017) spoke at a joint event with NPR and the Council of Foreign Relations in 2017, and reminisced about reading Havel's speech in 1990 as a young missionary in Namibia:

As I sat there and read Havel's speech, which was an encomium to democracy, a love letter to America, it was literary and inspiring....There's nothing quite like the sensation of having a man who had been stripped of everything but his dignity reflecting the ideals of your own country back at you....Now, Havel, soberly poured out his gratitude to the United States for the sacrifices our country had made in liberating Europe once again from the oppression of the Soviet Union. He said: it was the country that rightly gave people nightmares. It's no exaggeration that Havel's disquisition on democracy before Congress that day in 1990 was a turning point in my life, and certainly in my civic education. It took a new president of Czechoslovakia to enlighten a kid from Arizona sitting in Southern Africa about the indispensable nature of American leadership. That feeling has never left me.

Flake recast Havel's speech as a story about American values, and almost literally, a kind of missionary strain of such values. For Flake, the Czechoslovakian President was serving Americans in the address to reflect their own ideals back at them, and was celebrating the Cold War triumph of liberal democracy.

In this way, Havel's attempts to embody the end of the Cold War made his success susceptible to being touted as the ultimate vindication of (American-led) democratic values.

Zantovsky (2014) noted Havel's orientation of himself and the interests of Czechoslovakia towards the United States, writing that

Havel and America were a love story at first sight. America responded massively to his unquestioned bravery, to his visible modesty, and to his perceived cool. And Havel related just as strongly to the unfettered freedom and individuality of the country, to its openness and energy, to its tolerance to diversity and to its solidarity with people who were being deprived of the very same freedom and individuality elsewhere. There and then he seemed to have made the strategic determination that...the United States was ultimately a more reliable and a more consistent ally than friends nearer to home. This made for a subtle but permanent tension and source of internal conflict in his decision making, because in most other respects, such as his views on capitalism and the welfare state, the death penalty or environmental concerns, he was much closer to the concepts practiced in Europe in general, and the EU in particular. (pp. 359-60)

With this connection, there existed a tension between Havel's conscious choice to hitch himself and his nation to America's new world order, and his message about what the East could teach the West about building that order.

In some ways, the optics of the visit lent an air of triumph to the speech that vied against the actual words of warning embedded inside of it. Havel's invention in the speech transcended the complex specifics of political transition to represent a kind of universal, moral reflection about political values. On one hand, that gives the speech a more timeless feel, and can be used as an eloquent reminder about morality and sacrifice; on the other, it risks depoliticizing the moment. Noam Chomsky (1995) excoriated Havel's speech in a letter to journalist and friend Alexander Cockburn on the basis of this point, amongst some others. Chomsky called the Congressional address an "embarrassingly silly and morally repugnant Sunday School sermon" that was "one of the most

illuminating examples of the total and complete intellectual and moral corruption of Western culture.” Chomsky went on that

the phrases that really captured the imagination and aroused the passions of Congress, editorial writers, and columnists...that we should assume responsibility not only for ourselves, our families, and our nations, but for others who are suffering and persecuted. This remarkable and novel insight was followed by the key phrase of the speech: the cold war, now thankfully put to rest, was a conflict between two superpowers: one, a nightmare, the other, the defender of freedom (great applause).

But perhaps Chomsky’s main critique was that Havel’s address had little or nothing to say about the specific political situations and human rights crises in the so-called Third World or global South—the speech strictly adhered to an East/West orientation. Surely, to Chomsky, the catastrophic material effects of the Cold War were felt most deeply on the ideological and real battlegrounds of nations outside of the U.S. and Soviet spheres. Chomsky noted that

in comparison to the conditions imposed by U.S. tyranny and violence, East Europe under Russian rule was practically a paradise. Furthermore, one can easily understand why an oppressed Third World victim would have little access to any information (or would care little about anything) beyond the narrow struggle for survival against a terrorist superpower and its clients.

For this reason, Chomsky believed that the Congressional speech and its response by the West was “so revealing about the easy acceptance of (and even praise for) the most monstrous savagery, as long as it is perpetrated by Us against Them—a stance adopted quite mindlessly by Havel, who plainly shares the utter contempt for the lower orders that is the hallmark of Western intellectuals....”

Chomsky’s point, however vitriolic, was an important one: the Cold War stretched across the globe,

through proxy wars and invasive modernization projects, and a narrow view of it by influential intellectuals like Havel, who embody the so-called liberated “East” for America, could be dangerous.

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s critiques of Havel were more nuanced, but just as damning. In reviewing John Keane’s biography of Havel, Žižek (1999) expanded to write a reflection on Havel’s entire presidential oeuvre, and asked pointedly:

How do we get from the lone, fragile dissident with a crumpled jacket and uncompromising ethics, who opposes the all-mighty totalitarian power, to the President who babbles about the anthropic principle and the end of the Cartesian paradigm, reminds us that human rights are conferred on us by the Creator, and is applauded in the U.S. Congress for his defense of Western values?

Žižek then detailed how Havel’s ardent support of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and George W. Bush’s attack on Iraq, and his general adherence to Western leadership, revealed the hypocrisy underneath his rhetoric of universal human rights and moral responsibility.

Chomsky’s and Žižek’s missives against Havel, however stinging, demonstrate how complex and controversial the East/West frame of the Cold War remained. For these commentators, Havel was a kind of referendum on the meaning of the post-Cold War transition. For Chomsky, Havel was already a product of a morally bankrupt Western intellectual system; for Žižek, Havel was a tragicomic story of a genuinely courageous dissident who never understood that the very conditions by which he could speak out against the totalitarian system were part of the utopian vision of communism itself. Thus once he fully aligned himself with the West’s trajectory, he gave up any semblance of credibility to challenge both the Cold War and the post-Cold War frameworks. In fact, one of Havel’s great admirers, journalist Timothy Garton Ash (1999), spoke to this when he questioned

whether the ex-president of Czechoslovakia might not actually have a greater influence in Europe and the world today were he again able to speak with his own unique voice as an independent intellectual. But the die is cast. For another few years, at least, he will go on in the Castle, suffering up there for us; a living exemplar of the dilemmas of the intellectual in politics; condemned, like the central character in one of his own plays, to play out a role that he feels is not truly his own. (p. 68)

John Keane (2000) himself, after an interview with one of Havel's disgruntled former advisors about the American visit, wrote that "Washington's fascination with Havel...served to overinflate the Castle's sense of its own power in the world" (p. 411). Indeed, this might be a fair reading that, in some ways, the ecstatic reception in America was incongruous with the increasingly difficult transitions facing Havel's other audiences back home. He was now a working politician, not a philosopher and dissident, and once Czechoslovakians began to worry about the new economies and the re-emergent nationalisms in both the Czech lands and especially Slovakia, they looked to Havel not for moral lecturing but for material relief and political restructuring to account for such nationalism. That became more and more difficult as the Revolution and the certainties of the Cold War faded into the rearview.

Conclusion

Despite ambivalence in Europe, the West still has a love affair with Havel and the speech that brought him to prominence. In November of 2014, a bust of Havel was dedicated in a bipartisan ceremony at Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol (Dvorak, 2018). He was only the fourth foreign leader to be honored with such a monument. Speaker of the House John Boehner led the ceremony and remarked, "He was a writer who exposed the communists, using the one weapon that they couldn't match, and that was truth," while House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said, "President Havel was a defender of freedom, a champion of human rights, and an apostle of hope" (Hoke, 2014). Havel was

appropriated here both as the archetypal anti-communist and the ultimate representative of global human rights, roles which were seemingly conflated by American leaders like Boehner and Pelosi at the end of the Cold War. And most recently, a series of editorials and essays from different sides of the aisle appropriated him as a source of contrast for President Donald Trump. Writing for the *New Yorker*, Pankaj Mishra (2017) noted,

The spontaneous and vigorous opposition to Trump, whether at the women’s marches the day after his Inauguration or at the protests at U.S. airports in support of a viciously demonized people, has already manifested many of the qualities that Havel wished to see in civil society: trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, and love. Many more people realize, as Havel did, that arbitrary and inhuman power cannot deprive them of the inner freedom to make moral choices, and to make human community meaningful.

In *The Washington Post*, Michael Gerson (2017) contrasted Havel’s rhetoric with Trump’s, writing that “Any kind of serious social renewal begins, in Havel’s view, with each of us. ‘That is: in all circumstances try to be decent, just, tolerant and understanding, and at the same time try to resist corruption and deception.’” For Gerson, Havel was “a Czech giving voice to real Americanism. It is certainly not the spirit of Trumpism, which exemplifies the moral and spiritual poverty Havel decries.”

Appropriately, there are still challenges to this sometimes hagiographic appropriation by Western editorialists. Responding to the bust dedication in Congress, Czech journalist Jan Culik (2015) recently spoke of Havel’s controversial legacy in the Czech Republic, while warning that “America’s perception of Havel...seems stuck in a time warp.” He went on to write that many Czechs “resent the notion that they should only be used as a proxy instrument for asserting American interests,” which confirm an “arrogant, colonial attitude toward their country.” While Americans could watch from a distance, with a sense of satisfaction, the Czechs peacefully toppling the regime,

Germany reuniting, and the Soviet Union collapsing, those actually undergoing such massive changes in these areas tended to understand figures like Havel differently. Thus, Havel's symbolic weight in America versus back home remains open and contested, but still relevant nonetheless.

In conclusion, any reading of the Congressional speech must examine not just the words themselves, but the kind of legacy they prescribed for Havel at the end of the Cold War in both the East and West. For David Danaher (2015),

The conventional story of the East/West dynamic is both formal skeleton and cage. It is a conceptual blend that compresses the many nuances and human complexities of the Cold War into a simple form, and we have come to inhabit the blend's conceptual space and 'live' in the world that emerges from it. East and West reduced to a dichotomous opposition is still, almost twenty-five years after the revolutions of 1989, a deeply entrenched cultural frame that suggests to us a certain way of understanding history, both past and present, and it therefore also suggests a certain way of understanding ourselves and our future. Havel's conscious reframing of the conventional story is an attempt to transcend this conceptual cage. (p. 172)

In some ways, Havel articulated the challenges of a "new world order" better than his new friend President Bush could. His version of the post-Cold War implicated *all* (East and West) in the sharing of both the era's stability and its unrest, and sought a higher form of civic culture to navigate the uneasiness of transformational change. His invention of post-communist leadership was as much about morality as it was traditional statecraft.

But Havel's attempts to transcend, as his critics charged, risked ignoring the material realities of the global Cold War, and made him an all-too absorbent symbol that could easily be appropriated for different political purposes. Havel's speech showed the complex nature of invention, a process that in this case involved the creativity of one dynamic rhetorical agent in the face of transition, but also encompassed the ways such creativity gets re-appropriated and re-circulated by various

international audiences to make meaning out of that transition. With Havel marking the temporality of the end of the Cold War as a momentous opportunity for change, and then personally constructing himself as the embodiment of post-Cold War democratic principles in the face of that change, expectations of what one inventive figure could actually achieve may have been set too high. What remains important, then, about the Congressional address, regardless of Havel's merits or demerits, is that it represents the tensions inherent in post-Cold War democratization. Liberal democracy generated rhetorical materials that could offer immensely creative moral renewal and the chance for new civic habits for post-communist nations and their leaders, but it was also limited by powerful Cold War frames and the realities of superpower politics. Living in that space of opportunity and constraint, Havel, his speech, and its legacy, serve as defining artifacts of post-Cold War transition on the global stage.

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i I do use the terms “East” and “West” in this essay, recognizing the pitfalls of such designations, but they prove important because these are concepts actors like Havel were still employing during transition (in this case, the West encompasses NATO nations, and the East, the Warsaw Pact nations).