

IDENTITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN VÁCLAV HAVEL'S
WORLD OF THOUGHT*Markus Hipp*

In the extensive and multitudinous work of the Czech author, human rights activist and President, Václav Havel, the notion of identity forms a leitmotif which occurs frequently and is constantly varied and developed in the various means of communication – plays, letters, essays, conversations, addresses – he uses. Whereas in his plays, Havel limits himself to showing off the grotesque and pathetic consequences of a world increasingly devoid of identity, and leaves it for the spectators or the readers to draw conclusions of their own, many of his essayistic writings can be interpreted as attempts at finding in and behind the illusory world unveiled by theatrical means something which, to quote Franz Kafka, might be named the indestructible in human beings. Havel regards the questions of human identity and human responsibility as inextricably intertwined. For him, accepting one's own responsibility as a prerequisite for accepting oneself cannot be seen as an exclusively relative event explicable by purely relativistic means, but represents, in the final consequence, an all-embracing act of taking position before an uncalculable supreme authority, an act that cannot possibly be delegated to someone else. Accepting one's responsibility Havel regards as an act of human transcendence taking place vis-à-vis a *fixed horizon of existence*. What, from among his writings, first suggests itself as testimony to his increasingly conscious reflections about his own life and the development of his thoughts, is *Dopisy Olze*, a collection of letters Havel wrote his wife Olga when he was in jail and which therefore represents the focal point of this analysis.