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2017 — SPECIAL ENGLISH ISSUE — FOR FREE

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You have just opened the Special English Issue of the *Film a doba* magazine (www.filmadoba.eu) which in its original Czech version is a quarterly aiming to promote Czech film culture. The Special English Issue is prepared twice a year in order to inform international fans of Czech cinema about the situation in the Czech Republic. *Film a doba* is the oldest specialized film magazine published in Czechia and is connected to the most important artistic currents of international cinema, in particular to the beginnings and the heyday of the Czechoslovak New Wave. Its pages helped form the theoretical background for the works of filmmakers who are known beyond the borders of the former Czechoslovakia and who in the past often received awards from prominent European film festivals. Names such as Jan Němec, Věra Chytilová, Evald Schorm, Pavel Juráček, Juraj Jakubisko, Jiří Menzel (Best Foreign Language Academy Award for *Closely Watched Trains*), but also those of an earlier generation—František Vlášil, Otakar Vávra, Ján Kadar and Elmar Klos (Best Foreign Language Academy Award for *The Shop on Main Street*)—can be found in journals published in France, Italy, the UK and the USA, and the work of these creators finds its continuation in filmmakers such as Jan Svěrák (Best Foreign Language Academy Award for *Kolja*), Jan Hřebejk, Bohdan

Sláma, Miroslav Janek and many others, whose films you can learn about in this very issue. It includes a summary comment on last year's Czech films by the critic and film theory teacher Jaromír Blažejovský, interviews with up-and-coming directors and their views on film, their poetics and the practical aspects of shooting or their thoughts on the problems of the present-day world. An interesting excursion into the field of animation, which has been one of the mainstays of Czech cinema, is provided by the text on the latest Czech animated film, *The Oddsockeaters*, and the international reaction it received. You will naturally also read the opinions of prominent Czech film critics on current film production in Czechia. Many of the reviewed films have already been presented to audiences at Berlinale, Tribeca, Rotterdam and at other film festivals. Of particular note is the review of the book-length study by the film historian Lukáš Skupa on film censorship in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

Should this issue pique your interest, please feel free to get in touch with the magazine's executive editor Michal Kříž at lugarдон@gmail.com.

Eva Zaoralová

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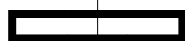
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↳ Red Captain (A Company)

New Deprived Individuals Will Rise



On the Czech fiction films of the past season

Jaromír Blažejovský

Czech cinema has witnessed a breakthrough: in 2016, 15.6 million moviegoers visited domestic cinemas (which is the most since the sharp decline back in 1994, the beginning of commercial television in the country), out of which approximately 4.6 million people went to see domestic titles. Compared to the previous year, the numbers more than doubled. There were around sixty feature films produced, around a third of which were documentaries. From the critical point of view however, this was the artistically weakest season in many years.

The top of the box office charts is occupied by *Angel of the Lord 2* (*Anděl Páně 2*, by Jiří Strach). It was seen by more than a million viewers, which means nothing more or less than that a lot of people were curious about the sequel to the original made-for-TV film *Angel of the Lord* (*Anděl Páně*, 2005), the prettiest classic Czech fairy tale film made

after 1989. The original film was written by Lucie Konášová, replaced for the sequel by Marek Epstein, while both films were directed by Jiří Strach. The once fresh idea made for a painful sequel: the story takes a long time to take off, it is gloomy rather than cheerful and the theological jokes have lost their former elegance. The now aged, exhausted and hung-over angel Petronel, accompanied by the fiend Uriáš, stumble through the snow-covered streets of Český Krumlov on the eve of the day of Saint Nicholas in search of a misplaced apple from the tree of knowledge. They scare naughty children and together with the schoolgirl Anežka face attacks from a cruel gang of carol singers. In the meantime, Anežka's mother Magdaléna is being exploited by an evil capitalist in a nearby factory. The angel and the fiend both make clumsy attempts to win the single mother's favor; she however grows fond of a street sausage peddler. The conclusion is made sweeter by the inclusion of torrents of Christmas mu-



↳ In Your Dreams (Cinemart)



sic and Christmas emotions. The one preserved point is the effort to show likable characters as alcoholics: while in the original film it was the young nobleman who kept drinking himself senseless, the sequel starts with the angel Petronel hung-over after a party. Intoxication is normal is the message of the *Angel of the Lord* to children. It is unavoidable not only in Czechia but also in the Christian heaven.

A surprising success (almost 400,000 moviegoers) was recorded by another comedy for mature audiences and senior citizens, *Tiger Theory* (*Teorie tygra*, 2016), the delayed directing debut of the producer and journalist Radek Bajgar. It is a defense of men who suffer due to their partners' anxious effort to control their lives and physical health. The film makes use of popular actors, especially the charisma of Jiří Bartoška, who plays the role of a vet who fakes episodes of memory loss in order to escape his wife's bossiness. With no respect to gender dogmas and a reproachful attitude to women, Bajgar's film presents a crisis of masculinity. The tired tempo, gray melancholy and the obtrusively banal music of Jan P. Muchow embrace exhausted audiences who come to movie theaters in search of resonance with their own experience.

Even more of a success at the box office was the cemetery romance of another successful producer and late-debating director, Tomáš Hoffman, from a screenplay by Martin Horský, *Stuck with a Perfect Woman* (*Bezva ženská na krku*, 2016). It is a variation on the beauty and the beast story: a jilted thirty-something woman from Prague accepts a job of a village teacher and gets lodging in the house of a rude gravedigger who unsurprisingly turns out to be a gentle and sensitive man. The acting duel between Petra Hřebíčková and Ondřej Vetchý is propped up by the nonsensical theme of the social exclusion of said grave digger, who is hiding from his family. The film's village is nothing but yet another of those idyllic, comical or horrifying open-air museums that haunt filmmakers' minds but have nothing in common with the actual Czech or Moravian countryside, such as Zdeněk Troška's *Babovřesky* (2013–2015) series or the comedies *Nowhere in Moravia* (*Díra u Hanušovic*, by Miroslav Krobot, 2014) and *Victoria Angel* (*Andílek na nervy*, by Juraj Šajmovič, 2015). It would seem that humor and kitsch do not go well together

because a joke is either funny or it's not, but it cannot fake emotions. Contemporary Czech films nevertheless do manage to combine kitsch and humor. This is because they are cheerful rather than actually humorous.

Fairy Tales for Emma is well-executed Christmas kitsch. The filmmaker Rudolf Havlík is a businessman and traveler rather than a director, a Czech celebrity with enough contacts and resources to make a film. His second work is more focused and disciplined but also more conventional than his debut, *All My Tomorrows* (*Zejtra napořád*, 2014). However cheap and far-fetched the plot of *Fairy Tales for Emma* is, the actors Ondřej Vetchý and Aňa Geislerová manage to save the melodramatic story (an immigration officer is trying to stage a wedding so that he is given care of the daughter who he didn't know existed). *Fairy Tales for Emma* is professionally better executed than *Stuck with a Perfect Woman*. The success of Hoffman's film was probably due to the attractive title.

Bohdan Sláma's new film *Ice Mother* (*Bába z ledu*, 2016) has been popular with audiences and the way the characters are outlined and the plot planned out shows that the story was intended to arouse certain emotions: compositional motivation prevails over realism. The spoiled boy must be bullied at school; the competing brothers have to behave like "dickheads" (to quote from the film); the daughter-in-law must be a distant bio-mother; even the hen is depressed. And the bowl of soup has to shatter at the right moment. Bohdan Sláma came a long way from his empirical, intuitive beginnings with *Wild Bees* (*Divoké včely*, 2001) to mature into a Hollywood-style director who has everything under control and leaves nothing to accident; in a way, he has been following the path of Miloš Forman, with whom he conducted a series of interviews for a book published in 2013.

Miloslav Šmídmajer is another producer turned director. He directed the romantic comedy *I Love You Heavenly* (*Miluji tě modře*, 2016) from a screenplay by Forman's former collaborator Jaroslav Papoušek. The story of a National Gallery curator and shopping window designer's love gives the impression of taking place in a dream world of long-gone Czech poeticism: picturesque houses with courtyard galleries, cir-

cus artists, an old photographer who gropes naked girls, abstract painting as something new and exciting. All of this tidy and completely outside of any trend.

Women for themselves

The Czech-Slovak co-production *All or Nothing* (*Všetko alebo nič*, 2017), directed by Marta Ferencová and based on a novel by Eva Urbaníková, is a project that its creators made more or less for themselves. It is the type of film that drives men crazy but its commercial success (half a million tickets sold in Czechia and Slovakia combined) seems to prove that Urbaníková and Ferencová correctly estimated the preferences of female audiences. They based their work on girlish scheming with the belief that if the women on screen laugh a lot, smoke a lot and drop a lot of one-liners (“let’s just not shit ourselves now...”), this will result in a funny movie. No comma in the title suggests that it does not refer to an alternative, that is to say, either all, or nothing, but rather the meaning which includes both: all and nothing at once, which is in fact fairly descriptive of the result. This is among other things because female characters mean all to the story, while male characters amount to nothing.

Much like in Sam Taylor-Johnson’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), based on the eponymous novel by E. L. James, the film is conspicuous by its lackluster male characters who have no personal stories and only take the function of mathematical constants, or to quote the critic Kamil Fila, “clothes hangers”. In *All or Nothing*, Polish actors are cast as lovers with stubbly chins, then overdubbed with hollow Czech or Slovak voices (there was not enough money for Italian lovers), but could have as well been played by snowmen, with the same result. The creators distinguish between two kinds of men: lustful and influential lovers who win women over easily, and caring and sensitive gentlemen whom women at first tend to ignore. There are—for sake of gender balance, probably—two over-acting gays. The sexist portrayal of men in films aimed primarily at women can be, I admit, an equivalent of the one-sided portrayal of women seen in films for men.

Another example of celebrity films is the comedy *Dating Site* (*Sezn@mka*, 2016), written and directed by Zita Marinovová, author of books for women. She strives to find

the answer to the question “why are men like that”; that is to say, why they cannot cultivate long-term relationships with mature women and instead constantly try to seduce new girls, ideally college-aged. The central theme is the one-liner taken from life: “So we slept together a couple of times, I don’t see how you could have thought we were going out together.” Dialog from the simplistic story, full of product placement, is occasionally funny.

The sixth part of the once popular series about “poets”, created in the 1980s by the writer Ladislav Pecháček and director Dušan Klein, was met with an indifferent reaction on the part of moviegoers. The story of Štěpán and Kendy titled *How Poets Wait for a Miracle* (*Jak básníci čekají na zázrak*, 2016) closes in on a full circle. The two perpetual youths are left with a feeling of nostalgia for their school days and a perennial interest in young women, this time with the conspicuous presence of a certain pharmacy chain.

The stream of bland comedies is strong enough to take with it even directors who used to have festival ambitions. Vladimír Michálek made *Holidays in Provence* (*Prázdniny v Provence*, 2016) from a screenplay by Daniela Miňovský, about a pop band who seeks shelter in sweet France. The most dramatic part of the plot is one of the musicians contracting diarrhea and the heavy drinking of their manager. The otherwise boring film is livened up by the presence of the still charming Jana Krausová in the role of aunt Agáta.

David Kočár’s film debut, *Ostravak Ostravski* (2016), inspired by the texts of a mysterious blogger who has been writing in the Ostrava dialect for over ten years now, awakened hopes that an at least mildly polemic, even subversive film could be made outside of Prague. The comedy includes a mild attack on the practices of the well-known coal tycoon Zdeněk Bakala, but offers no alternative opinion. The most important part is once again product placement, this time on the Ostrava-Prague railway line.

Two new comedies were contributed by the former theater director Tomáš Svoboda, whose *Husband to Rent* (*Hodinový manžel*, 2014) spent a surprisingly long time on the box office chart. The sequel titled *Husband for an Hour*

⇒ All or Nothing (Bioscop)



(*Manžel na hodinu*) is based on the mistaken assumption that the viewers came to like the protagonists of *Husband to Rent* and will be happy just to be able to see them again. The result is stagnant and boring, with the only memorable moment provided by a product placement gag featuring a bus. Another comedy by Tomáš Svoboda, *How to Shake off a Bride* (*Jak se zbavit nevěsty*, 2016) at least has some sort of a plot, simplistic as it is: female vindictiveness is an eternal and fruitful topic.

In his new film *The Spooks* (*Strašidla*, 2016), written by Jiří Kos, Zdeněk Troška tried to follow up on the tradition of crazy fantasy films such as those written by Miloš Macourek and directed by Václav Vorlíček, creators of the classic *The Girl on the Broomstick* (*Divka na koštěti*, 1971). The intertextual jokes are intended to make the impression that the filmmakers have some sort of distance and are able to juggle different genres (fairy tale, romance, satire, horror, children's film). The film boasts some special effects but lacks plot coherence and was accepted during the off-season with a sense of relief for being something else than another part of the Babovřesky series.

The most painful contract between hectic efforts and sad results can be seen in Jiří Chlumský's *Doubles* (*Dvojníci*, 2016) from a screenplay by Petr Hudský. Ondřej Sokol plays the double role of a thief and a high school teacher hunted by a criminal gang, trying his hardest to be funny and to avoid getting beaten up.

Decline of suspense

If comedy, the national genre it has always been in Czechia, seems to suffer due to the sheer flood of new titles, the adventure films come off even worse. The project *Once Upon a Time in Paradise* (*Tenkrát v ráji*, by Dan Krzywoň and Peter Pálka, 2016) had its ambitions; it was based on a story by Josef Urban and inspired by the life of the Czech mountaineer Josef Smítka, who managed to hide in the mountains from the total mobilization of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia era. The film was initially announced as being directed by the famous Croatian director Lordan Zafranović; his name however eventually disappeared from the credits and the movie lists its directors as Dan Krzywoň (another producer turned director)

and Peter Pálka. They could take advantage of an exciting and partly true story, attractive locations and good actors, including the excellent Jan Budař in the role of the Sudetenland mountaineer and later member of the SS, Horst Gerke. The resulting film is ruined by narrative incompetence, with the plot dynamic shot down by constant slowing due to editing (carried out by the experienced Jiří Brožek) which repeatedly favors natural scenery over a proper increase in pacing. Another failure was that of the South Bohemian Western *Green Horse Rustlers* (*Zloději zelených koní*, by Dan Włodarczyk, 2016) based on a novel by Jiří Hájiček. The adventure plot, which involves a search for semi-precious moldavite stones, is killed by a banal and forced love story. The film thus failed to stay true to its own genre and, consequently, find an audience.

Remarkable cinematography (Kacper Fertacz) and editing (Lucie Haladová) is to be found in the Czech-Slovak-Polish crime film *The Red Captain* (*Červený kapitán*, 2016) from a bestseller by Dominik Dán, directed by Michal Kollár. Much like other projects by the producer Viktor Tauš—*Clownwise* (*Klauni*, by Viktor Tauš, 2013), *The Red Spider* (*Červený pavouk*, by Marcin Koszałka, 2015) and the miniseries *Blue Shadows* (*Modré stíny*, by Viktor Tauš, 2016)—the film spent a long time in development and makes use of innovative methods, but does not care too much about the accessibility and comprehensibility of the narration. The cold reaction of Czech moviegoers (a mere 14,000 viewers compared to 86,000 in Slovakia) may have well been caused by the Czech dubbing, which was a poor match for the film's Slovak background. The creative powers of the crime genre are currently being absorbed by TV series.

Compared to older films about the Heydrich assassination, Sean Ellis's British-Czech-French co-production *Anthropoid* (2016) put more accent on action, melodrama and, let us say, the philosophical aspect of the subject matter, stunning viewers: there has so far never been such a severe portrayal of Protectorate-era Prague, the post-assassination reprisals and the Czech and Slovak resistance fighters. The acts of heroism appear as though they were brought to the screen from some sort of alternative history where everything takes the form of a Hollywood blockbuster and the fighters struggle with existential questions.

→ We Are Never Alone (Falcon)



The hectic desire for action left its mark even on such charming and technically admirable projects as the animated *The Oddsocketers* (2016) based on a book by Pavel Šrut and directed by the book's illustrator, Galina Miklíková. The humorous idea concerning creatures which are to blame for missing socks in human households loses some of its value due to its placement in the mafia based genre, which simultaneously weakened its ethical message and made it more boring.

There was hardly any response at all at movie theaters to the combination of the physical activity called parkour and a surreal story about a girl growing up, titled *In Your Dreams! (Ani ve snu!, 2016)* and directed as the debut of another producer, Petr Oukropec, from a screenplay by Egon Tobiaš. The film is based on the strange visions of the traceuse Laura, which appear to be supernatural or even a symptom of a serious disease, but are more likely a product of teenage lethargy and excitability. Basically, it's Laura and Her Week of Wonders.

I, hatred

Czechs are ever more often described in the media as an evil, frustrated, xenophobic mob. Films with artistic aspirations strive to show what the Czech people might be like in their hateful hearts. The notorious findings of sociologists to the effect that supporters of ugly political movements are usually old and disappointed country people without higher learning (while the voters of implicitly "correct" parties are, as we all know, always young and educated big city dwellers) are illustrated by Petr Václav, who has been living in France for some time now, in his film *We Are Never Alone (Nikdy nejsme sami, 2016)*. One of the protagonists is a socially deprived prison guard who, in a captivating performance by Miroslav Hanuš, laments: "What have we got today? Fucking nothing! No sense of being a nation. Those above are making fun of us. Isn't it all fucked up?" He kills a Roma man and decides to run for president. His neighbor is a chronic hypochondriac who tastes his own excrement. There is also prostitution, grave robbing and killing of one's own grandpa. The sometimes black and white, sometimes colorful, earnestly hateful comedy cumulates all the vile things one could come up with in respect to the Czech environment. It was one of last year's few live action Czech films which tried to address audiences by taking a sharply defined albeit not very original political stand.

Tomáš Vorel shows life in the country as pointless and cruel in his tragicomedy *The Good Plumber (Instalatér z Tuchlovic, 2016)*; a shy middle-aged bachelor, suffocated by his bossy mother, helps a woman severely battered by her husband. The country people are shown as incapable of happiness: they are controlled by rage, racism and alcohol and fall victim to their social handicaps and low ambition in life.

Hatred is the topic of last year's standout film, *I, Olga Hepnarová (Já, Olga Hepnarová)* directed by two debuting directors, Tomáš Weinreb and Petr Gazda. They reconstructed the story of a frustrated woman who on 10 July 1973, at the age of twenty-two, drove a truck in Prague into a crowd of people waiting for a tram and killed eight of them. She was the last woman to be executed in the former Czechoslovakia. The filmmakers present Hepnarová as a victim of her unfeeling mother. They accentuate the lesbian aspect of the proud murderer. They shoot the fateful ride in a very gripping manner—from the point of view inside the truck. They tried to get as close as possible to their anti-heroine. Fortunately, they did not try to rationalize mass murder with the political reality of the times. The Polish actress Michalina Olszańska excels in the title role. There is no moral to the story, other than maybe the fact that cases like this one can take place anywhere and anytime. The film accidentally hit the international cinemas in a year of terrorist attacks committed in the

same manner. Its success cannot be repeated, as it is based on a unique criminal case. We nevertheless cannot be sure that this will never happen again.

Petr Jarchovský and Jan Hřebejk also returned to the normalization era in their *The Teacher (Učitelka, 2016)*. They intentionally shot it in an old-fashioned style as a typological study of an opportunistic woman who is able to spin webs of corruption and manipulate people regardless of the era. Another reflection of the past is found in the ostentatiously self-centered and posthumously completed film by Jan Němec (1936–2016) *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street (Vlk z Královských Vinohrad, 2016)*. The director of *Diamonds of the Night (Démanty noci, 1964)* was given the opportunity to take his departure with a playfully extravagant miniature.

Compared to the previous year, the influx of up-and-coming talent was not quite as remarkable. I will mention two of the debut films that entered official distribution yet which next to no one has actually seen. The psycho thriller *Taxi 121* (2016) is directed by Dan Pánek, who came from the amateur environment. *Road-Movie* (2015) was created at FAMU as the student film by Martin Jelínek from a screenplay written by Vít Zapletal, author of the respected debut *Dust of the Ground (Prach, 2015)*. Both films—the tense *Taxi 121*, about an attack on a young taxi driver by a frustrated old man, as well as the loose *Road-Movie*, about a random excursion taken by a manager and his childhood love—contain long dialog sequences inside running cars, and mirror the material and existential anxiety of young people, the way they are burnt out under capitalism and conformity, and are a metaphor for bondage and lack of freedom. In both films, young women are stronger and more active than young men. Both of these low-budget movies, propped up by product placement, speak for their generation and at the same time form a showcase of the craft and skill with which the up-and-coming filmmakers make their place among the professionals. Both films have pedestrian titles which betray a lack of ideas and a lack of interest in actual audiences.

Who would receive the Plush Lion, had the Czech Film and Television Academy not decided to abolish this prize for the country's worst film ten years ago? I dare not make a guess, since I see a whole basketful of such plushies. Many new directors appeared, but the films are interchangeable and have the same sponsored buses running through them.

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How Olga Hepnarová Traveled the World in a Praga Truck

Ondřej Pavlík

The by local standards unusually optimistic public discussion on contemporary Czech film this spring was dominated by topics such as “renaissance”, “pole reversal from mainstream to art cinema” and very careful use of the term “new wave”. After a long period of hibernation, local creators came into direct touch with European cinema and several of their films were screened at prestigious festivals.

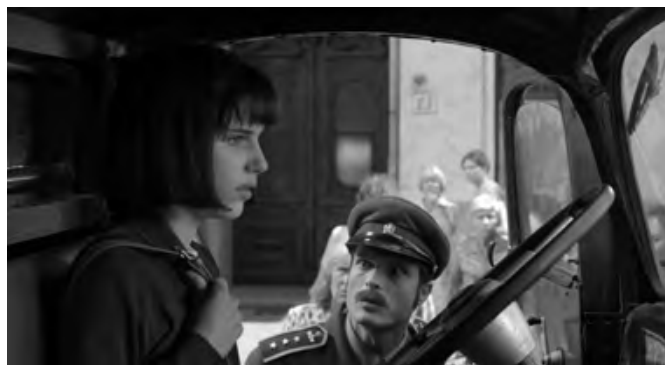
This is due in part to a change in the way young filmmakers think; they no longer aim their ambitious films primarily at the domestic market, but rather count on presenting them at international festivals and possibly in international distribution in advance. What plays a role in such cases? What are the unwritten “rules” to follow that can help a film from a small country, “developing” when it comes to cinema, succeed in the environment of global art film? And how are these rules reflected in the way these films are made?

Certain Czech films that made it on the international scene last year carry visible traces of such proactive thinking even in their titles, choice of topics and character profiles.

It is not by accident that the most likable character of *Family Film* (*Rodinný film*, 2015) is Otto the border collie. Pretty much everyone, regardless of race, gender and nationality, can sympathize with a dog, especially if the poor animal must endure the hardships of the wild. But what to do when a film tells the story of a person whose name resonates strongly in the local media environment yet is completely unknown internationally?

This is precisely the problem faced by the creators of the film *I, Olga Hepnarová* (*Já, Olga Hepnarová*, 2016) whose protagonist is a mass murderer and the last woman to be executed in Czechoslovakia. It is remarkable that the debut of the directing duo Tomáš Weinreb and Petr Kazda, despite its locally specific subject matter, has had as much success abroad, if not more, than the seemingly much more universal *Family Film*. *Olga* started its journey as the opening film of the Panorama section of this year’s Berlinale and continued by, among other things, winning the direction prize in Sofia, Bulgaria and was ultimately included in the “domestic





art film” catalog on the MUBI online portal. The following paragraphs will discuss the possible reasons behind this international success.

I will start by trying to refute a belief some might hold that the media image of a film is entirely in the hands of its creators or that it is a straightforward result of a carefully planned strategy. In other words, once a movie enters the international scene, it becomes open to a variety of different, sometimes unwanted associations, the most visible of which can be found in the reviews of international critics. It is especially during the festival rush that these writers often opt for simple, at times imprecise comparison. For example, another Czech film introduced at Berlinale this year, Petr Václav’s *We Are Never Alone* (*Nikdy nejsme sami*, 2016) was compared by Indiewire to the films of Alejandro González Iñárritu due to its web-like narrative structure and its attempt at universal outreach. *Olga Hepnarová*, according to Hollywood Reporter, aimed at the fans of the Polish hit movie *Ida*, a black and white period drama about a young nun.

The creators of the film *I, Olga Hepnarová*, led by producer and film editor Vojtěch Frič, made several public complaints against the frequent comparisons to Paweł Pawlikowski’s Academy Award winning opus. Both projects were produced in parallel, hence it is not possible to see “Olga” as a calculated move to ride to coattails of the recently popular title. There were nevertheless indeed some similarities, albeit superficial ones: the black and white “retro” visuals, the bleak story of a young girl from socialist Central Europe, a Polish co-production. It is enough to have the two films blend in the mind of a festival viewer unaware of further details and regional nuances. Although there are in fact many differences (to name just one, the cinematography of Adam Sikora is nowhere near as overloaded with aestheticism as that of the “academic” *Ida*), the association which was never intended could have in the end worked as an intuitive mark of prestige and make it easier for the film to succeed internationally. The UK distributor will surely have less of a hard time promoting *I, Olga Hepnarová* (shortened in the UK to *I, Olga*)





knowing that a couple of years ago, Pawlikowski's film won the country's biggest festival organized by the BFI.

The second line which draws "Olga" closer to contemporary tendencies in art cinema is the queer drama aspect. Films with LGBTQ topics have long since ceased to be seen solely at minor, specialized film festivals or side sections of large ones; these days they are regularly featured in the main competitions. Following the victory of *Blue is the Warmest Color* in Cannes three years ago, it became apparent that films of these kinds can win even the most coveted of awards. The decision made by Weinreb and Kazda to interpret the character of Hepnarová as an ostracized lesbian cannot, however, be simplified into a calculated gesture either. It was nevertheless a prudent step which made the hard-to-read character and the hardships she must go through in normalization era Czechoslovakia at least partially transparent to global audiences. It needs to be noted once again that the Berlin section of Panorama, where the film had its international premiere, collects in its program sexually provocative films, often with gay or lesbian themes.

While the previous two reasons for the positive international reception of "Olga" were closely related to current trends in art cinema, the following two reveal certain long-term rules of the festival circuit. Even though the concept of an auteur film has undergone many changes since the 1960s, echoes of its modernist origins are still distinctly present, especially in the European context. An obvious awareness of this tradition can then be of great assistance to a "local" film from a fringe cinematic tradition upon entering the international stage.

It is therefore important that "Olga Hepnarová" is not a classic biopic full of meticulously reconstructed period objects, information and data. It is more of a timeless portrait of a marginalized young girl. Olga might not be exactly a Joan of Arc, even though she is somewhat reminiscent of her in defiant rebellion. A much more distinct resemblance is to French director Robert Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967). The film also refers to this work by one of the most famous modernist auteurs with its stripped-down style—the down-to-earth but effective framing of the camera shots or the austere film editing. A lot can be read from the very contrast of the grumpy, slouched figure of the (anti)heroine and the characters that surround her.





In this context, the film can successfully inspire discussion as to whether Olga Hepnarová was a martyr to sympathize with, a mentally disturbed monster or a misunderstood woman who was in many respects a victim of bad luck. The fact that the movie does not give an unambiguous answer to these questions is another advantage which reliably resonates at festivals. This is because the culture of the global art film is to a large degree still a culture of interpretation. In these circles, ambivalence and openness to multiple different readings have always stood for maturity and quality. This is especially so if the creators manage to find their foundations in thought currents deeply rooted in European culture. In case of “Olga” it is the admitted influence of existentialism, specifically Albert Camus, whom the protagonist quotes directly.

If the contemporary generation of up-and-coming Czech filmmakers does in some ways resemble the famous new wave generation, it is mostly in their close relationship to the broader standards of European art cinema. After all, one of the reasons the first films of Miloš Forman managed to succeed at festivals in Locarno and Venice was their distinct adherence to neorealist principles closely tied to Italian culture. The present-day festival circuit is more varied and globalized but when it comes to the rules of inclusion, certain basic, historically given customs are still in place. Festivals are on the one hand open to films from basically all over the world, but life is much easier for those that make the impression of something familiar, aware of tradition and that fits the generally shared idea of “quality” filmmaking.

I am however not trying to claim that “Olga Hepnarová” succeeded internationally only due to these properties. It would be a mistake to see Weinreb’s and Kazda’s film as

a well-thought-out product the creators of which followed some sort of tried-and-true recipe for a “festival movie”. A whole separate chapter is the excellent acting of Michalina Olszanska whom the filmmakers did not try to guide as a Bresson-style “puppet” but rather allowed to get as deep in her role as possible, in the spirit of method acting. The relatively long, uninterrupted shots of lesbian sex are not self-serving, because they show the only moments when Hepnarová was capable of close human contact.

If this year’s discussion of the new Czech cinema up until now strove primarily to defend the existence of a stable rising current and to explain its reasons within the domestic context, the case of *I, Olga Hepnarová* reveals several specific international aspects and confirms their historical dimension. The paradoxical fact with all this is that the imaginary ideal of a competitive European film was most persuasively fulfilled in the context of the last batch of local movies by the drama of the “woman in a Praga truck”—that is to say, a subject matter closely tied to Czech national history.

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The Situation of Contemporary Czech Feature Animation Films

Malvína Balvínová

There have recently been opinions to the effect that Czech animation is “getting a second wind”. Czech filmmakers have indeed caught some attention even at international festivals. This is true in particular when it comes to short student films, some of which appeared in the year’s selections at Cannes and Annecy. There is, however, a whole number of other feature films which we will discuss here.

It is a well-known fact that in post-communist financing conditions it is very difficult to realize a feature film (or a short film with full artistic control, for that matter) and it

is no exception for such films to be produced over a number of years or even decades, sometimes never even making it to the big screen. Shooting a film at the standard rate of 24 frames per second is very time consuming when it comes to animation and the daily outcome is often no more than a few seconds of usable footage. Even properly made 3D CGI films are very demanding on time and labor. It is necessary to carefully model the environments and characters, which are then given skeletal animations, covered in textures, etc. Given that these films normally have a limited number of an-



imation artists working on them (some of whom are often volunteers or have no certainty of receiving any pay) their realization usually involves many delays. The filmmakers then keep looking for more sponsors and co-producers throughout production, often entering co-production deals with Czech Television or international partners.

Despite all this, every now and then a complete feature film makes it to Czech movie theaters. Last year it was the eagerly awaited *Little from the Fish Shop* (*Malá z rybárny*, by Jan Balej, 2015). The film spent several years in production before it opened in cinemas, and it excited many future viewers with exhibitions of its beautiful dolls. The detailed, originally stylized dolls in the atmospheric environment of a bleak harbor seemed to promise an interesting experience. The result was eventually mixed, even though neither the dolls nor the classic stop-motion animation lost any of their charm on the big screen. The problem proved to be the combination with computer effects, a vaguely defined target audience and missing dialog, replaced by a sometimes stiff voice-over. *Little from the Fish Shop* thus became more of an artifact, a set of dolls to put on display, rather than a successful film (although it was in fact screened outside of competition at the Annecy Film Festival). Audiences gave a more positive response to another film using dolls released at around the same time, *The Little Man* (*Malý Pán*, by Radek Beran, 2015). The movie nevertheless used marionettes shot in real time and did not include animation; therefore we won't discuss it here.

This year has already seen the release of two Czech animated feature films. The first was *Murderous Tales* (*Smrtečné historky*, 2016) directed by Jan Bubeníček. The anthology film took several years to complete, under the working title of the *Cactus Man Trilogy* (*Trilogie Kaktusák*). It has the distinctive feature of Czech post-communist feature animation—it consists of several stories, much like the *Fimfárum Trilogy* or the stop-motion film *One Night in One City* (*Jedné noci v jednom městě*, 2007). The individual stories do work on their own and in this case the actual connection between them is extraordinarily loose. The filmmakers claim that the stories are united by the theme of having “something small” encounter “something big”. The small hero relies on good luck and eventually prevailing, but in the end they nevertheless fail and die. The film has an inconsistent quality, also combining several techniques including live action and marionettes. The director nevertheless did manage to employ some original humor on certain occasions. Perhaps the best part is the last, darkly humorous story about two inept gangsters who

go on their last mission with vague instructions. The film was screened at several festivals including Febiofest and Anifilm. Another film released this year was Marek Beneš's *Pat and Mat in a Movie* (*Pat a Mat ve filmu*, 2016). It was made on the 40th anniversary of the two cult handyman characters, originally created by Vladimír Jiránek and the director Lubomír Beneš. His son Marek took up the baton and used his Patmat studio to shoot further series, although he appears to be more successful when it comes to merchandising. Pat and Mat are much more visible as toys and advertising figures than in quality film productions.

This year will see another release, namely the adaptation of the first book of *The Oddsockeaters* (*Lichožrouťi*) book trilogy written by Pavel Šrut. The book, with its original story and illustrations, was even voted the Czech children's book of the decade, and made into a film at the Alkay studio, which also served as its co-producer, using 3D CGI animation technology. The film was directed by the visual artist and illustrator of the original book, Galina Miklínová, who until then had shot only short artistic films or equally short made-for-TV cartoons for children. When *The Oddsockeaters* entered pre-production more than five years ago, some feared that the transition from 2D illustration to 3D CGI characters would lead to distortion and leave them looking bad, much like the Smurfs in the combined-technique feature film. Due to careful modeling and time-consuming work on the textures, the *Oddsockeaters* lost none of their original charm, even though some of their hardcore fans may be confused by the change of colors. The film should enter cinemas in the fall of this year and is considered to be the most eagerly awaited film when it comes to Czech animation.

There are nevertheless many other feature films in production which are mostly seeking more funding and are expected to be released between 2017–2020. This year marked a slight improvement of the overall situation. The State Cinematography Fund has been allotted 350 million CZK from the national budget to support Czech cinema. The Fund's council, which is responsible for distribution of this money, prepared a long-term concept on how to use the funds and set up priorities for animated films as well. Production companies have the option of requesting support for creation, distribution and propagation of animated films and it is therefore possible that realization of several projects which have been in production for years will move ahead significantly.

The Czech animated feature film that has by now perhaps spent the longest time in production is the stop-mo-



tion *Laika (Lajka)*, prepared by Aurel Klimt at his Zvon studio, with a planned release in 2017. Test screenings of the film in production, the budget of which climbed all the way up to 2 million EUR, were presented at AniFest in Třebíč as far back as ten years ago. It is supposed to be a sci-fi musical film about animals sent to space. In the meantime, there is a theatrical production, as well as a teaser which can be viewed on the Internet.

Another director working on a new film is Jan Švankmajer. The legendary Czech surrealist has a screenplay and visual concept ready for a movie titled *Insects (Hmyz)*. The film is inspired by the play *Pictures from the Insects' Life (Ze života hmyzu)* by the Čapek brothers and takes place in a country community of amateur actors who decide to stage a play. The original idea dates back to the 1970s, but for various reasons, Švankmajer has only been able to start preproduction recently. He himself intends this to be his last feature film and the first one he is trying to partially fund using crowdfunding. As of the time of this writing he has already managed to raise almost the full sum. Thanks to fans from all over the world, shooting can start in the summer.

The Anima studio, based in the Prague neighborhood of Holešovice, is working on two feature films at the same time. One of them is an adaptation of Iva Procházková's book *Mice Belong to Heaven (Myši patří do nebe)*. There are several local celebrities involved in the project—the screenplay was written by Alice Nellis with Richard Malatinský, and the film is directed by Denisa Grimmová and Jan Bubeníček. Financing a demanding international co-production takes a lot of time; nevertheless the project has already seen some success and awards on the international stage, such as at Cinekid Amsterdam, Cartoon Movie Lyon, Financing Forum Malmö and APD Stuttgart. The film has strong international co-producers and should start production in 2017.

Another film made by the Anima studio is the stop-motion *Life to Devour (Život k sežrání)* which is currently at the storyboard preparation stage and has already had some dolls produced. Some two years ago, a short demonstration was made as well. The project stands out in its main topic, namely child obesity. It is directed by Kristina Dufková, who originally focused mostly on animation of painting on glass, yet has lately been drawn more to dolls—Czech Television recently premiered her stop-motion cartoon series *Stories about Mum and Dad (Povídání o mamince a tatínkovi, 2016)*. She herself said that *Life to Devour* involves a “material” topic which is best expressed by using dolls.

Another animation studio, Maur Film, also works on both short and feature films. The studio became well-known mostly thanks to its popular *Fimfárům Trilogy*. Its planned feature films include *The Eleven (Jedenáctka)*, an adaptation of the novel *Klapzuba's Eleven (Klapzubova jedenáctka)* and the project *The Crossing (Přes hranici)* to be directed by the well-known French artist and director Florence Miailhe. The film is a co-production (France, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic) and should be made using the demanding technique of painting on glass. Both movies are nevertheless in preproduction rather than actual production. The studio is also preparing the Biofilm project, which will take place inside the human body.

Another promising project is planned by the Nutprodukce company. It is a stop-motion film titled *Tonda, Slávka and the Genius (Tonda, Slávka a génius)*. The story was written by Filip Pošivač and Barbora Valecká, creators of the thirty-minute short *Deep in Moss (Až po uši v mechu, 2015)* which received an audience prize at AniFilm. This is once again a magic fairy tale, albeit somewhat bleak. The story involves two strange children from a dark tenement house who are brought together by the way they differ from others, and was ultimately made into a screenplay by Jana Šrámková. The film is at the stage of completion of the script and concept art (and fund raising, the budget being currently estimated at 1.5 million EUR), and is expected to be released in 2020.

There are more animated feature films, mostly in very early stages of development. Let us mention only *Golem* by Jiří Bárta, which has been in the planning stages since the 1990s. The only palpable result so far has been a short demonstration from 1996. The screenplay was written by Bárta with Edgar Dutka, but with a huge projected budget, the film has not been able to find a producer so far. In the meantime, Bárta actually made a different feature film with the Slovak co-production *In the Attic or Who Has a Birthday Today? (Na půdě aneb Kdo má dneska narozeniny?, 2009)* and a short film with Japanese co-production, *Yuki Onna – Snow Woman (Yuki Onna – Sněžná žena, 2013)*.

Only time will tell whether the increase in funds available from the State Cinematography Fund will have any impact on the completion of currently ongoing projects and the smooth development of new ones. Currently, a good strategy appears to be participation in international pitching forums, where aspiring filmmakers can find co-producers. There are other options as well; it is nevertheless ever clearer that today, what an animated film needs most of all is a good producer who knows all the possibilities and can take advantage of them.

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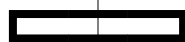
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About Slowness, Music and the Absence of Acting Gestures



Interview with Vít Zapletal

Jan Křípač

***Prach (Dust of the Ground, 2015)* was initially shot as your graduation film at the Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). How did the screenplay arise?**

I used to write different screenplays which were spread out too much. That was ultimately also the case of *Dust of the Ground* but with the previous films it was evident. So under time pressure before the screenplay submission I started looking for another subject and, inspired by various petty motives I found productive as such, my friend from the FAMU Department of Directing Václav Hrzina and I started working on a coherent story. We found it interesting to create a film about a feeling of life without aiming at anything specific, in other words an undefinable film such as *Kráva (The Cow, 1992)* by Karel Kachyňa or *L'Albero degli zoccoli (The Tree of Wooden Clogs, 1978)* by Ermanno Olmi. We just wanted to catch a piece of life in a certain mood. It was not until later that we defined the topics such as pain or an attitude to pain, etc.

In what phase was the project joined by the producer Radim Procházka?

After the first half of shooting when we ran out of money and did not know what to do. Although we had one half of the film shot, we had no prospect for finishing it. Radim Procházka then agreed on co-production with Czech Television, so we could finish shooting the film in the following year and a half.

Did you change the screenplay for this reason?

Yes, but not at the demand of the co-producers. For example, we had to stop shooting in the main location—a country house where most of the story takes place. So we built a room and a half of another room in a FAMU studio. For the rest of the house we had no money left, so I had to move the scenes from the half-built room elsewhere, etc. The screenplay then had to be modified a lot for these practical reasons.

***Dust of the Ground* premiered at the FAMUfest in November 2014, in 2015 it had an international premiere at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and in 2016 it got into Czech distribution. Did the film go through any other changes during this relatively long period of time?**

No, except for the final title sequence and the title itself. [At the FAMUfest the film was presented under the title *Vyzpytatelné cesty (Unmysterious Ways)*. – ed.]

How did you choose the actors, who were mostly unknown to a wide audience?

At FAMU I only worked with non-actors because I do not like working with professional theatre actors. I intended to carry on doing so, of course, but some of the characters had long dialogue or there were characters with a voice trained in public speaking (such as the teacher or the priest), so I thought to myself that it would not matter if they were played by theatre actors. But I would never cast famous actors everybody knows, because the audience would then tend to think of what was written about this or that celebrity in yesterday's newspaper while watching the film.... I started looking for actors based on the physical appearance of Radek Valenta so that the audience would then truly believe that they are members of one family that the story tells us about. In this way I found Radek's film brother, their parents and then their partners.

How did you work with the actors?

I wanted the actors to feel natural in their roles so they would not play them in a theatrical manner. Therefore I used technical language when talking to them. I found it best to talk to them on purpose about editing: "Wait here for ten seconds. I need some space for editing." I also tried not to tell them about the clear psychological motivation of the characters. In general, I like when an actor does something I do not understand at all and I know that it is not an acting gesture. So sometimes I gave the actors such instructions that they did not know what they would do exactly and I looked forward to being surprised.

From then on when they played a scene in a little bit different way than I had expected, I preferred to change the screenplay and adjust the subsequent story to these departures from the initial plan than to force them into following the screenplay more precisely or to reproach them for anything.

***Dust of the Ground* has a remarkable visual component which is not exaggerated, yet showing that you want to use it as a main narrative tool. How would you characterize your style?**

It was also interesting for me to work with the spiritual entities as other characters or plot movers so I wanted to put the story into as common and visually plain environment as possible. So I forced the cameraman Ondřej Belica, who had worked on very stylized films, into this verism. And when my friend Tomasz Mielnik [the director of the film *Cesta do Říma*

(*Journey to Rome*), 2015 – ed.] saw our rushes he said that it looks like a home video. And I thought to myself "This is exactly what I wanted!" (laughs). So this is how we worked: in a simple, a bit naive manner. I wanted the film to be pleasant to watch, therefore there are so many trees, greenery... I often worked with the visual side based on its tactile elements, so the scenographer Jana Hauskrechtová and I built the set according to its materials in order to evoke haptic perceptions. So this is how we played with the details. Sometimes I had the feeling that I was handling the scenographic details more than work with the actors. At that moment I found it more important than acting which is probably evident about this film (laughs).

At the same time I think it is a virtue. The film lives its own life independent of its characters and dialogues. How did you build its distinctive, gentle rhythm? Was it just a matter of shooting, or did editing also play a role?

That was my intention from the very beginning. Before having a story I wanted in the first place to make a slow film that is pleasant for the audience. The intention was then disturbed a little bit by the story because death, which is an important motive of the film, is usually gloomy for the audience. I wanted to work mainly with the musical rhythm, i.e. to build this formal aspect of the film so as to act independently of the plot and the plot then to comment on the rhythm in the background. Because there are films working almost only with the rhythm regardless of the story, e.g. *Im Lauf der Zeit (Kings of the Road, 1976)* by Wim Wenders or the three-hour documentary film *Die große Stille (Into Great Silence, 2005)* by Philip Gröning. So I knew that it would be that slow and then I thought of how to make the story bearable for the audience (laughs).

At last year's Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, within the Pitch & Feedback program, you presented your new project *Sršeň v lahvi (Hornet in a Bottle)*. What phase are you now in?

The production has again been taken charge of by Radim Procházka and Mikuláš Novotný under the Czech production company Background Films. The film's co-screenwriter is Radim Valak this time. Now we have about the third version of the screenplay, we have received financial support for development from the State Fund of Cinematography of the Czech Republic and if we manage to find one more co-producer, we can start shooting in about a year and a half. But it remains to be seen.

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The Oddsockeaters Is an Adventurous Gangster Film



An interview with Galina Miklínová, the film's director, graphic artist and co-screenwriter, and Petr Horák, the head of Alkay Animation Prague studio, a co-producer

Jaroslav and Malvína Balvínovi

After several years of hard work the Czech animation scene finally saw the premiere of *Lichožrouti* (*The Oddsockeaters*, 2016), probably the most expected full-length animated film of the year 2016. The bestselling book *The Oddsockeaters* by Pavel Šrut and Galina Miklínová has found fans in many countries around the world. Such are also the ambitions of the film adaptation.



Who came up with the idea to film *The Oddsockeaters*?

Galina Miklínová: The idea or rather an impulse arose from our friend Ladislav Horáček who had published *The Oddsockeaters*. Once on our way to the Czech town of Litomyšl he asked me why I don't make a film based on the story if I make animated films. Soon after publishing the first part, the book became very successful so the idea was considered basically from the very beginning. Pavel Šrut and I talked a couple of times about potentially animating *The Oddsockeaters*. Ladislav Horáček arranged a meeting with the producer Ondřej Trojan, who he had known through Petr Šabach, who promised to consider the idea and come back to me in two weeks' time. Then he called me to say that he was for it. Everything went smoothly. Later it became much more complicated as such a huge project required a lot of work which, with all due respect, nobody can really imagine. I became involved with Petr Horák's Alkay Animation Prague studio, who I have been cooperating with for years now, and the Film and Television Company Total HelpArt T.H.A. raised funds for the production.

Why did you choose the 3D computer animation? Were you not afraid that the original two-dimensional illustrations would lose their magic with their conversion into 3D?

Galina Miklínová: It was the opposite. *The Oddsockeaters* are very good subject matter for a 3D animated film. The CGI technology allows children to have a better grip on the world we have created. Using computer animation was a logical outcome. In one of its two main story dimensions, the film addresses the issue of the Oddsockeaters' existence as a species. With realistic processing, the CGI animation enables us to maintain a delicate balance between believability

and fiction and to make great use of balance in creating the physical characters of *The Oddsockeaters*. They are not of flesh and bone because they eat socks so it was necessary to create textile materials for them. The CGI programs allowed us to stretch, tangle or make the characters transparent.

Did you want to differ from the book illustrations?

A book is a book and a film is a film. If we used 2D drawings, *The Oddsockeaters* would not be a mainstream film and we would probably not raise funds for it. I was also interested in trying something new.

Despite the use of the CGI technology, the animated Oddsockeaters have a different effect than characters in mass-produced 3D family films, for example the Pixar or DreamWorks studios.

Petr Horák: Compared to our studio's previous projects, it was necessary to set the technological and qualitative bar higher because it was required by the graphic concept of the film. We were aware of the fact that under Czech conditions we could not make a film like American animation studios. At the same time we did not want to make a substandard "plastic" CGI film.

Galina Miklínová: The visual style is distinct both in the animated film and in my books. As the author of the original illustrations of Oddsockeaters as an "animal species" I wanted to preserve the graphic concept, i.e. to differ from common production using 3D technologies by using authentic drawings, so all the modelled objects covered by specially made textures had to be manually drawn over. By doing so we avoided artificiality as a result of using the technology, and the objects, especially the characters, have been added a greater touch of authenticity. If you are interested, you can watch the trailer.



Did you have to adapt the story a lot for the film?

Galina Miklínová: Yes, we already did so in the phase of working on the subject. The first part of the book is very literary, so it was difficult to find a way of transforming literature into film and preserving the essentials that Pavel Šrut and I created in *The Oddsocketeers'* world.

I believe that the poetics of *The Oddsocketeers'* world have not totally disappeared from the film. At the same time it is a film which has a different function for its audience than a book has for its readers. In other words, it was necessary to create a magnificent action spectacle, which was obvious already in the phase of working on the subject. I wanted to differ from Czech short story full-length animated films and to create a compact, suspenseful, but also a movingly comic story of small Oddsocketeers in a big world.

What inspired the Alkay Animation Prague studio to become a co-producer of the film?

Petr Horák: I believe that the film also has the potential to become commercially successful abroad, so I consider the co-production to be a good investment that will definitely return in the future.

Galina Miklínová: It has been a pleasure to cooperate with Petr for years. I think that he understands my visual manner of expression and he has always done his best to meet its demands technologically. Moreover, *The Oddsocketeers* are the dream of every animated film studio, so I think there was no reason to doubt.

How did you manage to find other co-producers? When and why was the project joined by your Croatian co-producer?

Petr Horák: The Croatian co-producer Arsen Anton Ostojić and his family are my longtime friends, who I have been spending my holidays with for several years on the island of Brač where Arsen's parents come from. During our long summer evenings spent in the local taverns, and on our trips on small fishing flatboats, we talked a lot about our potential co-operation and building an imaginary bridge of film friendship and co-operation between Prague and Zagreb. So when Arsen saw the first extracts of *The Oddsocketeers* and found out that the book had also been published in Croatian, he got interested in co-production and applied for a grant in Croatia which he was provided.

Galina Miklínová: We waited for the grant from Croatia for a long time but we received it in the end, although at the very last moment. Ondřej Trojan meanwhile arranged co-production with Slovakia.

How difficult was the film realization from the production and direction points of view?

Petr Horák: The most difficult thing was to decide on techniques that would allow a small team to keep the pictorial and cinematic quality we set at the beginning on the level of a full-length film. Then it was necessary to create such a team and to keep it at maximum power for three years in the Czech environment, which is not particularly open to animated films.

Galina Miklínová: For me as a co-author of the screenplay, an author of the visual style and a director, the most difficult thing was, in addition to dealing with a number of other issues, to keep the project above the set standard of quality. It was constantly necessary to go back, correct, wait, fiddle with something, motivate, accept criticism, criticize...and so on. As for production, I had to get involved much more than it is common because it was the first full-length 3D film for the T.H.A. company, so we were both fresh debutants in the field.

How long did it all take, from preparations until the premiere?

Galina Miklínová: It all took seven years. In February 2009 the first work on the subject started. The subject then underwent many changes, 10 screenplay versions were cre-

ated, in parallel with the development of the graphic and technological tests. Then we worked on the animatic for two years. Afterwards it was modeling, layout, texture mapping, rigging, simulations, animation, lighting, rendering, compositing, postproduction.... These were four years of the sharpest pace in my life when many phases overlapped, even those which should not.

Petr Horák: The production of the visual material from having a screenplay and graphic designs until the premiere took about 3.5 years.

How many animators, texture mappers and others participated in the film?

Galina Miklínová: It was a very subtle team of about 25 people which at the beginning seemed to be absolutely insufficient, but to my surprise and excitement everything went well and the team around Petr Horák from the Alkay Animation Prague studio did a great job. As for the numbers, there were for example only three texturers who manually drew over the entire film, three modelers, ten animators and so I could continue across all the professions.

Petr Horák: Yes, not only animators were involved in the film, but also storyboarders, modelers, texture mappers, IT programmers, riggers, lighting electricians, compositors and others.

Galina Miklínová: What was also helpful was that many of them could do more jobs or trained themselves, so that the team could "flow" where it was necessary.

Have foreign distributors shown their interest in the film?

Galina Miklínová: The producer has big plans with the film. There will be an English version, I have agreed with the Czech center in Madrid on Spanish subtitles and, of course, there will be also co-production versions. Given that the phenomenon of the *Oddsocketeers* had been spread around the world before the film premiere, they have already appeared in twelve countries in fifteen languages, so for the producer the situation is much easier now.

What age group is the film primarily intended for?

Galina Miklínová: If there is a limit to be set, it is 6+. It is an adventurous gangster film. Nevertheless, I believe that everybody can find something interesting in it. Both children and adults love the books about the *Oddsocketeers*, and I really hope that it will be the case for the film as well.

Are you considering filming new episodes of *The Oddsocketeers*?

Galina Miklínová: Definitely not right after the first one, I think. For continuing in such an adventure I would need a greater lapse of time. Now I am thinking of working on an art film for adults, so a totally different kind of film. But, of course, never say never. And that is what is exciting about it.

Petr Horák: I really hope that we will film new episodes in the future.

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Not Being Silent About Violence



An Interview with Tereza Nvotová

Miloš Kameník

Tereza Nvotová (born 1988) is an actress and a director of documentary and feature films. She has played a variety of film and television roles (*Malé oslavy* [*Small Celebrations*, 2008] by Zdeněk Tyc, *Kuličky* [*Marbles*, 2008] by Olga Dabrowská, *10 pravidel jak sbalit holku* [*10 Rules*, 2014] by Karel Janák, *Mars* [2017] by Benjamin Tuček). In 2009, her full-length documentary film *Ježíš je normální!* [*Take It Jeasy!*] was introduced into cinemas. Afterwards she graduated from the Documentary Film Department of the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU) and now is finishing her studies at the FAMU Department of Directing. Her graduation and full-length feature film *Špína* [*Filthy*, 2017] premiered at this year's International Film Festival Rotterdam.



Why did you decide in your debut *Filthy* to handle the topic of rape? Was it because you think it is necessary to change our reflection on the issue of sexual violence?

Exactly. At the beginning, however, we did not look for a thorny social issue to write a screenplay about. It originated rather from a certain burden that there had been many people around us with such experiences. So we had a feeling that it was the issue that had chosen us, not vice versa. And when Barbora Námerová and I started working on it, it was irritating for us to face a myth about rape that it happens at night to drunk girls in mini-skirts and that usually some random perverts are to blame. When you look at the statistics not only in the Czech Republic or Slovakia but also in the other EU member states you can see that the majority of rapes are committed in a “safe” environment by close people or acquaintances of the victims. We also wanted to show what it means to the victims, how it changes their self-perception and their perception of the world around them. Fighting such a trauma is hard, especially when you are a teenager afraid of telling it to anyone. Therefore I decided on a feature film because in a documentary film it would look more like the mental porn of certain people the public would tend to condemn or regret which is exactly what they do not want.

What do you think that rape victims wish for?

What they wish for is contained in the proper term that should be used for them, i.e. “rape survivors”, not “rape victims”. When everyone looks at you as at a victim, you begin considering yourself a victim and it is not easy to break out of that. It is also very common that mainly female rape “victims” are blamed for being provocative or wearing the “wrong” clothes. Has anyone ever questioned a murder because the victim did not behave properly? Why then do we question rapes? It is simply a crime, even if a man rapes his wife.

In film as a medium such traumas can be addressed from many different angles. Why did you decide on the ultimate form?

We have written a number of film versions and even the final one is far from a copy of the screenplay. Initially there were more subplots or dialogue. What we wanted from the beginning, though, was to tell the story from the point of view of the main female character played by Dominika Morávková-Zeleníková. Later, when editing it turned out that it was even more important because the choice of the shots or the dynamics of editing depended on her inner state. I think it is the biggest strength of the film and is also helped a lot by the actress herself. We approached the screenplay freely from the very beginning because we knew that it would change frequently and we did not mind that. Then on the set the screenwriter Barbora Námerová and I often crossed out or changed the dialogue in the process of shooting.

The topic of sexual violence is associated with a number of stereotypes. What pitfalls did you have to face in this regard?

Many stereotypes are connected with the rape scenes. We certainly did not want to top *Irréversible* (*Irreversible*, 2002) by Gaspar Noé because it is not only impossible but it would be also unnecessary to make a film as rough and as disgusting as possible. We tried to stay in the mind of the girl so it might make a softer impression, although still talking about rape which is not soft. It was interesting that when the screenplay was read by some men they could not believe that it could happen during the day when her parents were at home. What is crazy is that it is the most probable, especially when such sexual predators are experienced. We want to show that it happens exactly in such circumstances and that we often imagine a rape shrouded in darkness which is totally wrong. Was it also unbelievable for you?

Yes, a little. I was wondering why the guy is not afraid that the girl will start screaming or that somebody will enter the room, or why does he not do it in the evening when the girl's parents go to the theatre.

It is very different when someone does not do it for the first time. I believe that such a rapist's reasoning is not entirely rational either. I do not want to claim that sexual predators are such and such. I do not know exactly what goes on in their heads. It is even more difficult than to understand what goes on in the head of a victim. What I know is that a more frequent reaction to a rape is not screaming, but shock and silence. I have heard even more unbelievable stories that have happened in our country. Critics might blame us for such an approach but for us it is also a statement, i.e. when people get used to the fact that this is the reality, they might finally believe someone who has really gone through it. Then such a person might not be so afraid of speaking about it.

What people had you talked to about the topic of sexual violence before you started shooting? Had they been your acquaintances or had you also looked for other rape victims?

Actually both. Unfortunately, only in my circle of acquaintances there are quite a lot of people with such experiences. But we also looked for other cases. There are online locked anonymous forums where people write their stories. The more you get to the heart of the matter, the more information you get from the people you come across. I think that everyone knows someone who has experienced sexual violence, but we just do not know about it because people do not usually speak about it. That is the craziest thing about it.

Did you cooperate with professional advisors, do research, make special visits or have interviews?

A great part of the story takes place in a pediatric psychiatric department which is a specific environment that is isolated and for most people unknown. I suppose I will be reproached for shooting scenes which show such clinics in the wrong light, etc. We do not aim to stigmatize psychiatry more than it is. Our film also takes place in Slovakia where the situation is different than in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, we did not make it up which has been confirmed also by the children playing pediatric patients in the film. I found them in various diagnostic institutes, children's homes and psychiatric departments because I intended to show the situation in an authentic or even a documentary light. I do not want to make an impression that psychiatry cannot help people. I have taken several people there who wanted to or when we realized that it would be the best option for them. But I think it is not a good idea to leave a child in such an institution, not to care about anything and believe that it will automatically help him or her. The human factor plays an important role here and for example in the Slovak psychiatric hospitals, doctors are really exhausted and angry at the system. Pediatric psychiatric departments are also specific in the fact that adults and children do not really believe each other there. The children lie because they are locked in there against their will. They do not understand that someone is there to help them. For the doctors it is then difficult to know what is true and what is not.

The main character Lena at first tells no one what has happened to her and suppresses her trauma for a long time. Have you thought of what would you do in a similar situation?

Yes, a lot. But it is impossible to answer such a question. The human mind does not follow instructions for use. These are delicate issues that we tried to point out in the film. The relationships with the people around you, as well as in your family, are crucial here. In *Filthy* the fact that it is done by an unlikely person plays its role. He is a handsome and nice family friend liked by everybody. Lena is afraid that nobody will believe her.



Professional actors appear in the film next to non-actors, especially in supporting roles. What criteria did you follow when choosing your actors?

I had chosen some actors from the very beginning, e.g. Anna Šišková playing the mother or Róbert Jakab playing Rob. On the contrary, I needed a large casting to choose Dominika Morávková-Zeleníková who would play Lena. The gift that she has is that you want to look at her all the time whatever she does. To find an actor for the role of Lena's disabled brother also took me a long time. By casting Patrik Holubář we thus created a Czechoslovak family, as I had not been able to find a Slovak boy who could manage to play it. In the psychiatric department I combined actors with non-actors. The doctor and her two patients are actresses and the rest are children I had found in various diagnostic institutes and children's homes. Although we had a screenplay with dialogue, I knew that no conservatory students would be able to play it. And I think that if the environment was not entirely authentic, the film would lose a lot of its qualities.

How much did you rehearse with the actors and how much did you rely on improvisation?

It was actually a mix. The most improvisation was in the group therapy scenes where the actresses knew the basic dramatic arc of the situation, the conflict and the end. The kids, however, knew nothing so they just reacted to what was going on there. We used two cameras and then I worked on it as a whole in the editing room. Actors also improvised, for example in tense arguments when I knew that waiting for written dialogues would only hinder them in their emotions. It was also necessary for them to prepare for their roles in order to know exactly where their characters are and what they experience.

Did your personal experience with acting help you in guiding the actors?

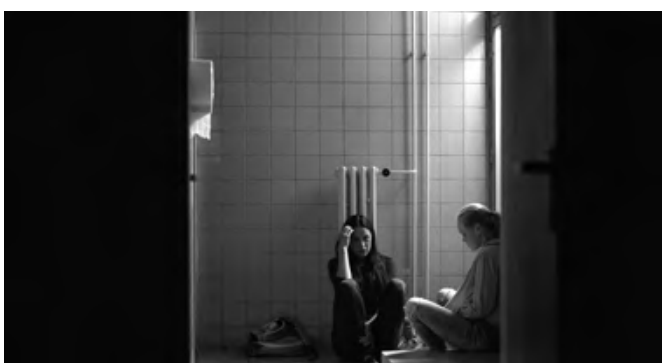
Yes, I think a lot. When improvising it was rather about my manipulative skills from playing in documentary films (laughs). But when directing actors' actions and emotional states I relied on my personal experience with acting. I often asked myself what would be helpful for me as an actress. I had been lucky to work with several film directors so I knew for example what does not work.

Films are sometimes roughly divided into "acting" and "visual". It seems to me that *Filthy* is balanced from this point of view. Do you agree?

I have never thought about it really. It is important for me to believe the acting. Even when we try a scene for the eleventh time I am always nervous when looking at the screen. As for visuals, I must admit I have learned a lot thanks to directing *Filthy*. Marek Dvořák and I prepared a lot by creating storyboards of each scene. We did not want to change the size of the lens mechanically but always following the meaning. If focusing on a detail had no other reason than visual we did not include it in the film.

Had you asked anyone for advice regarding directing?

Not at all. I would not be able myself to advise anyone how to direct. It is interesting that in my M.A. thesis I am writing now about the techniques of directing actors. At the Department of Directing where I am studying, each director has their own style so there is no particular technique taught. So teaching how to work with actors is more about stories from shooting, whereas for example in the USA there are elaborated acting methods you can read about in books. I have been





there at several workshops, so without using any particular method I have used some elements that I have learned.

What was inspiring for you?

Sometimes there were some trifles. For example you have a scene starting in the middle of a situation and for actors it is very difficult to put themselves in the proper mood. To give them enough space I shot a long introduction to get them where I needed and then I just cut out the introduction. Commercial directors who are often under time pressure focus a video camera on you and tell you, “Say this dialogue and play this emotion.” I know how difficult it is to look at a piece of an adhesive tape on the wall instead of looking at an actor and to play some emotions. You can imagine the situation but it is much better to be in the situation and not to think of whether there is a video camera or not. Before starting shooting, the actresses, Patrik Holubář, the screenwriter Barbora Námerová and I went to a cottage where we discussed the screenplay for the actors to understand better what characters they were going to play and for me to get to know them better. It was important especially for Dominika because her character does not speak much in the film, so we discussed every single scene for her to know what goes on in Lena’s head and what she experiences.

How many days did you shoot?

In total we shot for forty-one days during one year. The first phase was shot in spring, the second in winter and the third at the end of summer because Dominika got pregnant during the period of shooting so we waited until she gave birth.



Forty days is quite a lot nowadays.

It is. We also did not have much money but I tried to agree with the producers better on less comfort than on less money. Luckily, it was possible to fine-tune everything.

Was the film radically changed during editing compared to the screenplay?

Definitely. During the shooting I cooperated in total with three editors although it was not my initial concept. It was caused by various complications, health problems and so on. I started working on editing with Jiří Brožek, continued with Michal Lánský and finally with Janka Vlčková. In the end it was good though. Each editor came up with something new. I would actually recommend other film directors to try cooperation with more than one editor. With one editor you reach a certain point and have a feeling that it cannot be done another way. Another editor is not so much locked into it because they do not know it that well, so their reflection is freer, brings a new view of the film, a new film language. For example Michal Lánský came up with jump-cuts. It was a good means of expression achieved by editing at the moments when the character gets into various emotional states, changes their world view or perception of their surroundings.

How do you achieve a balance between an emotional, psychologically realistic narrative and a distanced style working with hints and an observing or even cold distance?

Together with Marek Dvořák we did not address it comprehensively, but rather according to the situation. For example, in the argument between the girls on the bridge we



wanted to give them more space for improvisation, and the video camera had to be adjusted to it, so we used the method of handheld shooting, because in such situations you do not want to keep a distance but on the contrary be with the characters. In other situations keeping a distance is not bad and helps to make an even stronger impression.

To what extent did you think about working with sound and music before starting shooting?

As for the sound, I wanted us to perceive the surroundings from Lena's angle. When she sees things with heightened senses or when she is out of her mind, all the noise around is less pleasant. I knew from the very beginning that there would not be much music in the film. I really do not like when music, especially in Czech films, is overused and tells us what we are supposed to feel. People are not idiots. As for emotional experiences, *Filthy* is a dramatic film, so I opted for the minimum of music which, of course, does not mean that it must be inconspicuous.

Several film directors have recently appeared in Czech cinematography shooting in a similar way, i.e. in a style inspired by foreign festival production. Do you feel generational or aesthetic kinship with filmmakers such as Mira Fornay (*Můj pes Killer* [My Dog Killer, 2013]), Jan Těšitel (*David* [2015]), Vit Zapletal (*Prach* [Dust of the Ground, 2015]) or Olmo Omerzu (*Rodinný film* [Family Film, 2016])?

We know each other but we do not really keep in touch.

What do you think about their films?

I like most of them. As the filmmakers Jan Němec or Věra Chytilová pointed out, the representatives of the Czechoslovak "new wave" were not close friends either. Some of them were good friends but not all of them. They came up with interesting things, maybe each of them was bolder because the others were bold...maybe they were influenced by the era they lived in. I do not know, I think we will never be a wave. Perhaps as a generation we do not consider the Velvet revolution to be the starting point of our existence, which was the case for the generation of filmmakers like Jan Svěrák or Jan Hřebejk. Maybe this is why you have a feeling that we fit more into the current festival production because it is natural for us to watch films from all over the world and we also have much faster access to them on the Internet.

Are any foreign filmmakers inspiring for you? What are you in accord with in current world cinematography?

I cannot name just one thing or one film director that has inspired me, but I watch current films and they certainly affect me. Instead of a TV I have a projector at home for watching films I find interesting or essential and which are usually not in distribution. I do not think though that you can find in my film a distinctive element of another film. Before shooting *Filthy* our team watched some films we found inspiring in order to find a visual way but all of them were very different.

Do you think that filmmakers today have to strike a balance between making their films comprehensible to a wider audience and fitting into the current festival production?

I have decided not to deal with this issue. I did not want to think about who specifically this film is addressed to. We knew from the very beginning that we had a story and that it was not going to be a film just for a club or festival audience. We wanted *Filthy* to be seen not only by cinephiles, which, however, did not make us adapt or simplify anything. On the contrary, we often crossed out some dialogue in the screenplay because in the final film version they would be superfluous or too explanatory. I think that a good film can speak to both groups but to reach a wider audience is paradoxically more complicated and costs more money which is usually insufficient for non-commercial films.

What are you currently working on? Are you considering shooting a new film?

Currently, I am finishing a full-length documentary film for HBO about Slovakia from the perspective of the character of the former Slovak prime minister Vladimír Mečiar but it is not his mere portrait. It is pleasant to work on because it is a totally different type of film, enabling one to relax emotionally while shooting. Now we are working on editing and we still have some parts to be shot. The premiere will be most likely at the end of this year. My FAMU classmate Barbora Námerová and I would also like to cooperate on another feature film.

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FEELMS SMITHS

The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street (Vlk z Královských Vinohrad, Czech Republic, 2016)	
Directed by	Jan Němec
Written by	Jan Němec
Cinematography	Jiří Maxa
Cast	Jiří Mádl, Lucia Gajdošík, David Bowles, Táňa Pauhofová, Jiří Bartoška, Martin Pechlát, Karel Roden and others
Runtime	75 min.
Distribution CZ	Artcam
Release date	15 September 2016

Sunset over Royal Vineyard Street

Many filmmakers see cinematic works as a certain form of communication. The narration itself as well as its subject matter draw and tempt the audience into a discussion. Should we leave aside the general meaning of this perspective (each work of art is a specific form of communication, film being no exception), the individual communication impulses, appearing in intentional and unintentional layout throughout the work (whereas each of them is an important precondition of the whole process) can be seen from the perspective of the strategy they use. Their classification would be possible but hopelessly imperfect in any of its forms. The simple wordiness of many cinematic attempts at depicting the authenticity of human dialog does not go together well with the quiet (whispering) amazement over what people can do. The viewers (and some critics) often celebrate the simple joy of talking (narration), which is in many cases supported by its pretended mass appeal, while restraint in this respect is usually seen as the inability to creating anything meaningful; the fullness is nevertheless often close to consumerism. A favorite impulse, often found in other artistic fields as well (for instance in literature) is the essentially therapeutic effort to establish communication. It is therapy by creation. It would appear that Jan Němec, for many the most original creator of the Czechoslovak New Wave, was a lover of impulses, was fond of gathering them in his films and ironically pointed out all efforts at describing them. He himself—as a director and creator—suffered from the general demand of “being original”. Narrating one’s own failures and the impossibility of succeeding (more generally this involves the failure of everything that is human) form the still often neglected Němec’s “image therapy”. The culmination was intended to be reached in Němec’s cinematic diary for everyone: *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street* (*Vlk z Královských Vinohrad*, 2016). He did not manage to finish it, but thanks to help from Tomáš Klein and others, the film actually made it to release. The film was

screened as part of the main competition at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, which can in the given context be seen as an extension of Němec’s therapy into reality.

His narrator is in the general sense suffering from a certain form of doubt—with respect to the world about which he speaks, to his own character which lays out the global meaning of the world, and to the narration itself. The book on which the film is based, *Nepodávej ruku číšníkovi* (*Do Not Shake the Waiter’s Hand*, Torst, 2011) is the constructive impulse for cinematic images, because what has once been said cannot be repeated, but can only be shown (depicted) in a different manner, based on a different perspective. *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street*, a loose, associative adaptation of several short stories from the aforementioned collection, is in any case repeating (from the creator’s perspective, this is citation) doubt with respect to narration and the characters who are either part of the given act or a subject thereof, manners and forms of view of what is to be depicted (fish eye, cuts and sequences from Němec’s other films) and the overall formal character of the work (the biographic diary and glossary of the “Cretan liar”). The literary and cinematic narrators in Němec’s oeuvre play a very similar role: they talk so as not to die. Would it be too daring to claim that Němec the director after 2000 no longer cares about what he is narrating? To a certain degree it is possible to see a profound suspicion with respect to everything meaningful (according to the etymology of the given word); the narrator addresses the audience as a master of ceremonies (Karel Roden) and presents what they are about to see as a game played with fate by the director John Jan (Jiří Mádl). The author’s perspective, made complete by the addition of the voice and shadow of Němec himself, dominates, dialog and the psychological dimension of the depicted characters is the narrator’s alibi that prevents viewers from walking out of the cinema. Everything that the author-narrator Karel Roden says or chooses to pass over in silence, poor Němec-

Jiří Mádl has to actually live through and the structure of this living through has a relatively well-defined temporal and spatial dimension. The film's story outlines connections with the 1968 Cannes Film Festival where three Czechoslovak films appeared in the main competition (Forman's *The Firemen's Ball*, Menzel's *Capricious Summer* and Němec's *A Report on the Party and the Guests*) and which was canceled due to the revolutionary fervor of a minor fraction of French directors (the event in question was coincidentally discussed in the previous issue of *Film a doba*), the August occupation of Czechoslovakia (Němec creates an "associative stream of voices" here of Jiří Voskovec's *Oratorio for Prague* [*Oratorium pro Prahu*, 1968], Karel Roden's *The Ferrari Dino Girl* [*Holka Ferrari Dino*, 2009] and Jiří Mádl's *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street*) and Němec's forced exile and his return to the home country after November 1989. While the character of the author (Karel Roden) speaks, the character of the narrator (John Jan) acts. This is a game of speaking, but let us not forget: it is the impulses that are important rather than what is being talked about. Certain Czech critics give completely nonsensical praise to the very ending of the film, at times even presented as a certain form of punchline; the pretend meaningfulness is the equivalent of a spit, not a piece of information hidden like some sort of foundation beneath the sediments of time, but rather a simple impulse to more speaking which Němec-creator no longer wants to listen to.

Much has been said about the fractured style of Němec's films after 2000. The fragmentariness and diary-like "biographic" method reveals the actual strategy based on a paradox: it is only possible to talk about Němec with Němec. The narrator circle moves through the cinematic machine which produces meanings. In its own way, it is an idiosyncratic form inspired by visual art which is closely related to the "crumplages" (orig. "muchláž", a form of collage) by Jiří Kolář. This image reproduction technique, wherein the picture is literally crumpled, deformed and spatially transported, allows the creator to have previously unseen relations suddenly stand out. Němec is probably intentionally showing off his interest in the cinematic essay, that is to say, a manner in which it is possible to use the camera eye to see the invisible world of thoughts and ideas; to literally gain an insight into the soul through the window of film. The historical context is well known: the film essay is essentially trying to capture a new way of perceiving and capturing reality based on the tradition of classic documentary film, but rather than depicting the "bright tomorrows" (Hans Richter, *Der Film Essay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms*, 1940) it strives to find a suitable representation for the intellectual contents or imagery fitting for mental concepts so as to have the visible world of traditional cinematic imagery replaced with the invisible world of thoughts, concepts and ideas: that is to say, the world which can impact the viewers intellectually and emotionally, to make them into actors on the stage of life which ignores the borderline between fiction and reality. It was not by accident that the film essay was supposed to become an essential form of human experience in the context of

reconciliation with the traumas following the Holocaust and a new point of view of the post-war cinematic new wave, as was hinted at in many ways by two of the prominent figures of French cinema, Alain Resnais and Jean-Luc Godard on the one hand, and the father of the 20th century philosophical-literary essay, Roland Barthes, on the other hand. It is in fact a rather humorous paradox to see John Jan beat Godard to death with an ashtray; the adolescent enthusiasm of the old filmmaker kills the father of the tradition which the same filmmaker appears to be drawing on.

Despite its tried and proven cinematic method, Němec's last film opus proves a big disappointment. Almost everything that Němec presents with playfulness and distance (and a certain dose of wit and irony) is a mere repetition and ultimately an existential shaking of the waiter's hand. *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street* does not lack a recognizable gradation of narration (the creative enthusiasm of youth—the disappointment of adulthood—the hope of old age), especially John Jan's return to the home country carries with it a certain form of playful nostalgia, but the author's strongly defined strategy with respect to the character of the creator drags everything with it into the abyss of its own uncontrolled irony and attempt at distance. It would seem that Němec at the last moment did see something that is actually real rather than a mere impulse for more and more talking, a meaning worth narrating somewhere under the layers of his own self-centeredness. The cinematic form however does not manage to react in time. One could see the main reason for the disappointment in the film's being finished by young filmmakers who harmonically confirm and follow Němec's original creative intention, but this is something that is hard to judge. In the context of the Czechoslovak New Wave, Jiří Němec was the master of shortcut when it came to meaning; he came to favor a completely specific type of what is necessary to narrate (the necessity is urgently reminiscent of creative work here). Later, an older Jan Němec, having already been disappointed by private cinema, became an enthusiast of a communicative strategy based on impulses. He stopped believing meanings to be a part of this world, our language and thinking. One can merely desperately presume what goes on in the heads of others, hence the constructionally obsessive effort to peer into one's own head is a mere reflection of the inability to see others. What we have in hand are but material properties which form an impulse to speech acts or other types of action; meaning or information do not form the content of the transmission. *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street*, audaciously aspiring to the complexity of the social canvases painted by Martin Scorsese is a mere desperately incomplete result which does not stick to any of the roads it hints at consistently. This cannot be seen as some sort of power of an unbound genius watching himself in a mirror of individual uniqueness. The master of philosophical reflection once wrote: the owl of Minerva spreads its wings with the falling of the dusk. It unfortunately appears to have got lost.

× Michal Kříž





**The most audience friendly film
by the experimental filmmaker?**

The latest film project by Jan Němec, *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street*, was mostly based on four short stories from his popular book *Do Not Shake the Waiter's Hand (Nepodávej ruku číšníkovi)*, Torst, Praha 2010). He started writing these autobiographical texts in Prague back at the beginning of the normalization era, but wrote the bulk of them in the 1980s during his exile in Redondo Beach, California. He then finished them for publishing in *Reflex* magazine in 1990–91 and later for release in book form. The screenplay was originally created as a made-for-TV series for the producer Martin Froyda in 2013. Following disputes regarding its structure, Němec rewrote it a year later as a film script. It was then taken up by the producers Barbora Příkladová and Čestmír Kopecký's creative group in Czech Television. The project failed to receive support from the State Cinematography Fund and Kopecký's group was dissolved, after which the film was taken over in 2014 by Tomáš Michálek's Master-Film. Czech Television eventually joined the project as the main co-producer.

In spring 2015, Němec was therefore finally able to start realizing his project, already planned and partly written back in the USA in the 1980s as *Sunset Boulevard* (in reference to Wilder's film) or *J.N. Stories*. By that time, he was nevertheless already seriously ill and although he did direct most scenes personally, he did not live to see the film's release. Its final version was thus created mostly in co-operation with the assistant director Tomáš Klein, the film curator Jakub Felcman and the editor Josef Krajbich. During the time of cooperation with Froyda, Němec considered titles such as *The Greatest Loves of My Life*, *Silver Spoon with a Monogram* or *Monogram* ("That one captures everything—originality, exclusiveness, privilege, personality, arrogance and possibly deceit," he wrote.) He later referred to the project as his eleventh feature film ("Project 11") until he eventually settled on the final title, inspired by *Wolf of Wall Street* (directed by Martin Scorsese, 2013). The film was presented as part of the main competition at the 51st edition of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and earned a Special Mention of the Jury.

After a string of technologically and formally experimental films, Němec had similar intentions for this one, too. The main autobiographical character of the director John Jan ("J.J.") was originally intended to be played by the director Petr Marek, who was to shoot most of the footage on his mobile phone in "selfie" mode. Němec ultimately settled on a more conventional narrative form for the individual "scenes", accompanied with author's voice-over, the way he had already employed this feature in the similarly autobiographical *The Ferrari Dino Girl (Holka Ferrari Dino)*, 2009). The director is played (represented) by the actor and director Jiří Mádln in an eccentric pose, inspired by the personalities of Leonardo DiCaprio and Roman Polański. The commentaries, as presented on-screen in front of the "alienating" camera and as a voice-over, are provided by Karel Roden, Němec's alter ego



from the film *Late Night Talks with Mother (Noční hovory s matkou)*, 2001) and from the audio version of his short story collection. The third incarnation of the director was intended to be Jan Němec himself, who was to be present at least in the scene where he directs the award ceremony in which Jiří Mádln as John Jan accepts a Crystal Globe. The only remnant of this intended plane is the voice-over in the shooting scene in Cannes and the final scene where he directs Mádln eating an eye or cheek of a trout, establishing an ironic distance to the meaning of the film. Němec appears on screen only indirectly, when the same scene, with an allusion to *Late Night Talks with Mother* ("A window, a window into the soul"), has a piece of archive footage that includes the end titles of the TV documentary series *GEN – Eye (Oko)*, in which his face and eye appear ("That was the Eye of Jan Němec", says the corresponding end title).

The principle of framework composition was preserved from his experimental essay series (Roden in front of a curtain at the beginning and end of the movie). The individual stories are separated by blank dark frames, with the exceptions of the transition from the departure from Paris and Germany to California, which is separated by a shot of the Sunset Boulevard street sign, a reference to the original synopsis. Němec's stay in West Germany is represented by insertion of footage from his adaptation of Kafka's *Metamorphosis (Die Verwandlung)*, 1975) made for the ZDF, into the scene of interrogation prior to his departure for Paris, containing dialog between J.J. and a State Security captain about Kafka's work. In this dialog, Němec styles himself as a Kafkaesque "first modern European hero" who "gives up his place, family, career, in order to assert his belief in truth and justice", speaking in fact about his feelings of "alienation" and "loss of a sense of homeland" which forced him into his exile. Apart from the opening story, Cannes 1968, this scene is likely the only one which Němec lived long enough to edit completely on his own. Similarly, the story *Italian Connection* (about shooting in the August of 1968) has an inserted narrative—the fantasy *How I Killed Godard*, separated with scenes in which the cinematographer Jiří Maxa shoots a model of a Russian tank in a sandbox, along with toy figures of Russian soldiers and Czech demonstrators. It is here that J.J. beats to death the character of Godard who then lies dead in the same sandbox with the models and the camera. It is also the place where Němec inserts his contemplation on how he adopted Godard's editing method as one of the new wave filmmakers: "When he grows tired of a shot, he simply cuts to another shot that he likes.... he changed the whole film editing method and he was our model." He thus makes a post-modern commentary on his own working method and even symbolically "kills the father", the model, who with his 1970 film *Pravda* from his Maoist period betrayed the values which Němec believed in.

The whole film is replete with references to Němec's creative method, his films and quotations from them, because they formed a part of his life which he narrates. In the opening scene, Roden as Němec's alter ego speaks of "his"

loves, represented by actresses in scenes from *Toyen* (2005), *In the Light of the King's Love* (*V žáru královské lásky*, 1990; a shot of Ivana Chýlková moreover refers on another level to her relationship with Roden) and the *Ferrari Dino Girl*. Shots of yachts and promenading girls in Cannes refer to scenes from the Midem music event in the film *They Sing a Lot in the World* (*Ve světě se hodně zpívá*, 1968); and posters for the films *The Firemen's Ball* (*Hoří, má panenko*, by Miloš Forman, 1967), *Capricious Summer* (*Rozmarné léto*, by Jiří Menzel, 1967) and *A Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*, 1966) on the various objects and trees in Cannes are reminiscent of the poster of Štefánik placed on a tree in the park of the main railway station in the episode *My Process with TGM* (*Můj proces s TGM*, 2013) of the Customs (Celnice) TV series. Clapton's variations on Smetana refer to the same music used in *True Stories: Peace in Our Time?* (1988). Němec's shots from the radio building from August 1968, used without sound, refer to the same way in which they were used in *The Ferrari Dino Girl*, and which in themselves are a reference to *Oratorio for Prague* (1968). The reference to Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) in the commentary is, among other things, a reminder of the fact that Němec watched the film as one of his inspirations for *A Report on the Party and the Guests*. Apart from *Metamorphosis*, the California sequence then quotes his demo film for *The Golden Shell* project and the footage he shot at weddings. The story *Bridge over Troubled Water* has a view from a bridge, a reference to a similar shot in *Czech Connection* (1975) and the story *Coming Home* uses a shot of Václav Havel from the film *Heart above the Castle* (*Srdce nad Hradem*, 2006), which here also represents their other projects. Another similar reference is the shaking hand-held camera used for shots of Cannes by night as the "throbbing heart of the festival". The eye of the trout is reminiscent of the already mentioned documentaries from the GEN series and at the same time serves as a reference to *Late Night Talks with Mother* (much like Prague shot through a fisheye lens in the closing scene). There is also a reconstruction of the scene from *In the Light of the King's Love*, which is cited here in what looks like police footage with time stamps. The shot with a black flag waving over the Žižkov tower is then cited at the beginning of this story after the shots of Havel.

Němec and his collaborators narrate fragments of the story of his life, and the important political events which influenced it, with great self-assuredness, distance, light irony (self-irony) and overstatement. It is actually a sort of a picaresque novella based on situation that Němec finds himself in, narrated from a subjective standpoint. The pure storytelling which Němec was (much like Ivan Passer) capable of and thanks to which his life experience turned into stories, tales or humorous anecdotes and direct speech dialogs, I experienced with him several times. He used it not only in his stories, but also in a number of never realized scripts and sketches. It was found less frequently in his realized projects. Taking into consideration his previous ones with features of autobiography—*Czech Connection*, *Late Night Talks with Mother*, *Landscape of My Heart* (*Krajina mého srdce*, 2004), *The Ferrari Dino Girl*—only the last one listed has it. In *The Wolf from Royal Vineyard Street*, however, this method is the dominant one. This is demonstrated not only by the ironic and self-ironic commentary made sub specie aeternitatis, but also in the film-making methods which accentuate moments of play, of playfulness. These involve not only Roden's silent smile at the end of the commentary in front of the curtain in the scene with Ingrid (heart attack), and the sequence with Christie who plays for Němec (J.J.) his favorite Chiaccona by Bach ("Now it's time for kitsch, and then the drama"), but also the insertion of Mádl among women's clothes into Roden's commentary ("I will be played by an actor anyway and you can rest assured that it won't be Leonardo DiCaprio") and edits which alter between the staged sequences from August 1968, where the film's cinematographer Jiří Maxa

takes on the role of the cinematographer Vladimír Vízner, the actual authentic shots, and the shots of Maxa shooting the same scene with models in a sandbox. These also involve the alienating breaking of the fourth wall, with the camera moving away from the studio construction of the Immigration Office at the Holešovice market while J.J. leaves through a tin gate much like in the interrogation scene.

The playfulness of the retrospective sequences segues into a playful fantasy of a temporally concentrated episode of the Crystal Globe award ceremony at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival (Němec was given the award for his "lifetime contribution to international cinema" in 2006). The combination of archive footage and newly shot scenes results in the realization of a vision in which J.J. meets in one day at the Karlovy Vary festival the people who he already met in Cannes (M. Forman and J. Menzel—who in fact was absent from Cannes in 1968) and who both won the most prestigious award, an Oscar. They are applauded by the three post-November 1989 presidents—Havel, Klaus and Zeman. J.J. as played by J. Mádl (wearing shades like Godard and using a fisheye lens like Němec) wins the audience's and the girls' favor and speaks about his love of cinema as he receives the award. In his imagination, he also wins the most coveted award, an Oscar, which he receives in secret from his friend and publisher in Chicago, Miloš Stehlík. This ends his fame, the girls are taken away by his friend and a critic who accompanied him to Cannes, Jiří Janoušek, because his Aston Martin is more attractive than the SUV Škoda model driven by J.J.

The closing scene shows, using a fisheye lens (much like in *Late Night Talks with Mother*), a ride from the Václavské square down Royal Vineyard Street (where Němec spent his childhood and his youth) all the way to the Olšany cemetery with the family tomb, the park (much like in *Heart Beat 3D*, 2010) with a sunset, death. Royal Vineyard Street is the Sunset Boulevard of his exile and the symbolic route of his life and work. As Němec wrote in the screenplay: "This main avenue of mine, this artery of life all the way to its end, from St. Wenceslaus's horse to the Strašnice crematory and from there to outer space, is like Sunset Boulevard that starts in dirty downtown Los Angeles, crosses Hollywood and ends in the Pacific Ocean with a beautiful sunset."

In an e-mail to the critic Mirka Spáčilová, he characterized the future film as a "mildly tabloid social comedy about the energy and the eternal rebellious spirit, passing from generation to generation". His post-modernity is due not only to his use of pastiche, references and citations, but also due to his narration, "film about films" and his strict minimalism, which allows for shooting anything in any way, when imagination and playfulness meet in a happy match. No obstacle is insurmountable if you really want to do something and achieve something. Němec, with help from his collaborators, surpassed financial restrictions, his own illness, and, ultimately, even death. His dream film is here and we can have different opinions of it, or simply enjoy it. It spans from Kafka to Hašek and for Němec, the war is already over. Thanks to his film, we can meet at the pub U Kalicha one last time and enjoy some fun, or make it ourselves. Or simply watch Němec fight like a wolf for his filmmaking territory, unafraid of failure. In his director's explication, he wrote: "No respect for the traditional filmmaking methods. 'Want to get your face smashed—here you go!' as the sapper Vodička from Hašek's Švejk would say."

× Jan Bernard

Teacher (Učitelka, Slovakia – Czech Republic, 2016)	
Directed by	Jan Hřebejk
Written by	Petr Jarchovský
Cinematography	Martin Žiaran
Music	Michal Novinski
Cast	Zuzana Mauréry, Csongor Kassai, Zuzana Konečná, Peter Bebjak, Martin Havelka, Tamara Fischer, Richard Labuda, Oliver Oswald, Éva Bandor, Ina Gogálová, Monika Čertezni and others
Runtime	102 min.
Distribution CZ	A-Company Czech

That's because us comrades are on first name terms

The fact that the works of Petr Jarchovský and Jan Hřebejk form the backbone of Czech filmmaking after 1989 is something I do not write here for the first time. These creators manifest, thanks to their work ethic, the strongest continuity as they add, year by year, together or separately, another vertebra, a film or a TV series, and aim it at the center of the ongoing moral debate or at least at the place where they think the center/clash resides at the moment. They make the impression of trend-setters of the mainstream: few Czech screenwriters experiment with narrative strategies as inventively as Jarchovský, few directors follow the international production as closely as Hřebejk. The center-oriented quality of the two creators' work is further confirmed by the choice of topics: they explore the horizons, transgressions and hopes of the middle class in historic confrontations. When I write about center-orientedness, I do not mean mediocrity: J&H's work is well above Central Europe's average, as documented by the interest expressed by international journalists whenever one of the duo's films appears in competition at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. *The Teacher* marks the fifth time this happened.

Jarchovský and Hřebejk moreover agree with metropolitan art opinion, which dominates the media, even though this current of thought diverges from the majority view of the general population. The interpretation of history as they present it is nevertheless something that the public gladly identifies with: films like *Cosy Dens (Pelíšky, 1999)* or *Identity Card (Občanský průkaz, by Ondřej Trojan, 2010)*, both adapted from Petr Šabach, are seen by viewers as authentic expression of their experience with the Communist regime. The perspective in question is at the same time youthful, if not juvenile; this type of vantage point on the years of totalitarian government is usually most successful in the individual post-socialist national cinemas.

The nostalgia of those who experienced the times firsthand may draw attention from the fact that the filmmakers do not put historical authenticity first. If the story requires it, the screenplay diverges from actual history. In *Pupendo (2003)* we followed two families whom the regime prevented from traveling to the sea, so that they eventually got no further than the Balaton lake. However, someone who was allowed to travel to Hungary in the 1980s was also allowed to travel to Romania or Bulgaria, both of which do have warm





seas. Not to speak of the fact that Hungary was far from a foggy wasteland to people of Czechoslovakia as *Pupendo's* epilogue suggests, but more of a promised land of fashion shops, great films and rock concerts.

The Teacher wants us to believe a story in which the principal of an elementary school and her deputy conspire back in the 1983–84 school year with certain children's parents against an ordinary teacher who is the school's head of the Communist Party. As we are aware, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did exercise its power, in keeping with the official doctrine, through communists in leading positions. It is therefore unimaginable for a school principal not be a party member. In order for the CPC to also serve its so-called supervisory function, it was prohibited to have the same person in the leadership position both in the workplace and party structure. This was usually solved by having the person with the most suitable background take the workplace leadership position while the position of the party head was given to the number two.

The Teacher therefore begs the question of why the comrades did not discuss the problem on the level of their local party organization. It is improbable for a principal, and therefore necessarily a communist, to use a petition to assert her opinion, a method usually employed by dissidents. It could of course happen that the party leadership was taken by some sort of big fish on the regional level. The film however says nothing to this effect; the only thing we learn is that the late husband of the teacher Drazdechová was an officer and that her sister lives in Moscow.

Membership in the Communist Party is presented in the film in terms of anecdotes, the audience reacts well to the joke about party comrades being on first name terms. We suspect that at least the judge Malinovský and the head doctor Němec are in fact party members, while the Kučeras and Binders are not. Binder is said to have come into conflict with the law when he came to the defense of his wife when she

was verbally abused by an otherwise anonymous "drunk com-mie". Kučera says at home about Drazdechová: "Who does the communist swine think she is?"

It would appear that the filmmakers wanted to present a clash between politically defined good and evil. The conflict is nevertheless neither as formulaic nor as political as it may seem at first glance. The revolt of the principal and her deputy lacks the ethos of a true resistance. They want to take advantage of the parents' protests to get rid of an unpopular colleague. Once they appear to have been defeated, they try to sweep the affair under the rug. They are probably communist swine, as Mr Kučera would say. In order not to mistake them for people of character, we are aided by the musical commentary of Michal Novinský: the rhythmical motif played by strings and piano.

This might be one of the reasons why some critics see the film as too blunt. The two-faced characters of the principal and her deputy nevertheless show that there is plenty of space for debate in the story. Another ambiguous scene is the one in which Drazdechová examines Danka in Russian. The girl is supposed to talk about her own family; she instead mechanically memorized the sample text from the textbook. This looks like bullying on part of the teacher, but Danka did in fact behave stupidly in the situation, evidently failing to understand the homework. A more generous teacher would give her another chance. But a teacher is not obliged to be generous. Some might then accuse her of favoritism. This is a classic teacher's dilemma which teachers and students face day in and day out. I do not say this to excuse the actual mistakes of Drazdechová: asking for favors; telling selected children the contents of future tests; humiliating a girl student in front of the class.

The filmmakers paid attention to design: the architecture, interiors of homes and costumes all look believable. The introduction of the film catches viewers' attention with a huge illustrative propaganda inscription on the school build-

ing: “Peace to the world!” which refers to the World Assembly for Peace and Life, against nuclear war. This took place in Prague in 1983. On the contrary, the sentence from the dialog, “Is your uncle Brezhnev or something?” does not match the 1983–1984 school year, a time when Leonid Brezhnev was already dead and his position as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had been taken up by Yuri Andropov. I doubt that elementary schools back in 1983 used IQ tests; differentiation of pupils based on IQ was something that socialist education, if I recall correctly, did not adopt. Let us however admit this may have been the case, since the ministry could have been making various types of experiments in selected schools. The story has the teacher calling parents at home, but in the early 1980s, only about a quarter of all households in Czechoslovakia actually did have a phone line.

As if it wasn't enough for Mária Drazdechová to be a communist, she is also a Russian teacher and a Russophile. She collects matryoshka dolls and brings borscht to school. After the Velvet Revolution, she of course switches from Russian to English. Poor Russian teachers! They were seen with most sympathy by István Szabó in his *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe (Édes Emma, drága Böbe, 1991)* the film in which he as one of the first filmmakers viewed the post-socialist reality in a skeptical light. A cold distance was used by Tomasz Wasilewski in his *United States of Love (Zjednoczone stany miłości, 2016)*. Nowhere was a Russian teacher treated so severely as in Jarchofský and Hřebejk's *The Teacher*. In its genesis, the film is reminiscent of the excellent Slovenian drama *Class Enemy (Razredni sovražnik, 2013)*, where the creator Rok Biček similarly drew on actual school experience. The film nevertheless deals with the present rather than the socialist era. The teacher protagonist is an authoritarian tyrant who teaches German.

The fact that Mária Drazdechová triumphantly returns to the school after the revolution is a predictable point. The film does not explain how she managed to do this; we can only guess that she was able to present her forced abstinence from teaching as political persecution. It was after all two communists who fired her. We can imagine Drazdechová rattling her keys in the square during public protests, or joining the Public Against Violence protest movement. She will go on to also teach ethics and religion under a portrait of Václav Havel. This is a humorous manifestation of opportunism, seeing as how far she was in her practice from either ethics or religion. This humorous shortcut sums up the historical transformation that not only individuals but also scientific teams and institutions went through at the time.

Some say that if *The Teacher* had been created during the Perestroika period (1985–1989), it would have been an artistic milestone—but today? The objection is rejected. Jarchofský and Hřebejk were students back then and could hardly have produced a feature film. A more serious objection is that the profile works of the actual Perestroika did not take advantage of such simplistic polarization. *The Teacher* would have a hard time measuring up to the ambiguous Soviet films of the era—let us only mention the movies of screenwriter Aleksandr Mindadze and director Vadim Abdrashitov. Maybe the comrades did talk the problem through at a meeting of their local organization after all. We would then end up with a classic socialist film about the outdated bourgeois and rare maladies which the party uncovered.

This is why *The Teacher* only watches us with her cunning glance today as Jarchofský and Hřebejk's freshest work since *Cosy Dens*. The vindictiveness it contains (the end titles contain an ironic note of gratitude to elementary school teachers) gave it a certain spark. Given that it is a comedy, or even satire, we don't have to be all that strict about historical inaccuracies. The most precious part of the film is the very type of teacher, a sly intrusive manipulative monster, uniquely played by Zuzana Mauréry. Today we would say that Mária Drazdechová excels in cumulation of social capital. Even dur-

ing socialism, she manifested managerial skills and the ability to “win friends and influence people” (Dal Carnegie). These personal characteristics are what modern capitalism was built on. The film makes a tame hint at this possibility, which deserves praise.

This invites comparison with the Romanian film by Cristian Mungiu, *Graduation (Bacalaureat, 2016)*, also focusing on the topic of parents who are willing to go through any form of humiliation and corruption on behalf of their children. Both comedies have relatively strong storylines, yet formally represent opposite cases. Mungiu is capable of invoking the illusion of his film being open to interpretation, even though the trajectory of his ideas is precisely planned. *The Teacher* has a seemingly closed form; there is however an open field for discussion hidden beneath the surface of the anti-communist interpretation. *Graduation* uses the most up-to-date narrative strategies, sticks to linear narration and keeps certain information hidden until the very end. *The Teacher* opted for an outdated classical form of narration filled with retrospective sequences. It is intentionally shot in an artless, old-fashioned manner: a narrower aspect ratio, washed-out colors, a high rate of explicitness and redundancy. It is as if the filmmakers tried to imitate the bleak style of Normalization era movies. Jarchofský once again proved his fondness for experiment when he placed the most powerful turn of the story—Danka's suicide attempt—in a retrospective sequence in the 58th minute, long after this event first started to appear in vague references, rather than in the golden ratio time point where we would expect to find it.

The audience enjoys the dialog exchanges such as the one in the bathroom where Zuzana Mauréry finds a worthy opponent in Martin Havelka in the role of the wrestler Binder. The discussion at the parent-teacher conference however came out stiff: the participants, upset as they are, do not talk over each other but rather theatrically wait their turns. The creators inserted a clever self-reference in the form of the “divided we fall” quote included in a dialog. The sexual turn in the Binders' bedroom is something I see as a homage to Zdeněk Troška's *Kameňák* series.

In the recent years, films made in Slovak-Czech co-production have been released in the Czech Republic with Czech dubbing, which reliably killed them. *The Teacher* has only one version, mostly Slovak, and did not bomb at the box office. It did well at the box office in Slovakia and the Czech statistics are decent, too, albeit weaker (certain multiplexes did not show it). Some good news: the film often enjoys a round of spontaneous applause at cinemas. Some bad news: the applause is short and most viewers do not join it.

× Jaromír Blažejovský

energie českého filmu

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52. MFF Karlovy Vary



Zahradnictví:
Dezertér (v kinech od září)



Zahradnictví:
Nápadník (v kinech od listopadu)



Po strništi bos (v kinech od srpna)

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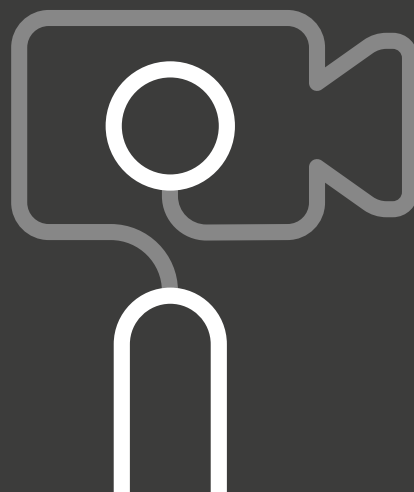
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Kvarteto (v kinech od listopadu)



Nechte zpívat Mišíka



The Oddsockeaters (Lichožrouti, Czech Republic – Slovakia, 2016)	
Directed by	Galina Miklínová
Based on	Pavel Šrut (book)
Written by	Galina Miklínová, Pavel Šrut
Cinematography	Tomáš Sysel
Music	Filip Míšek, Martin Tvrký
Hrají	Ondřej Trojan, Kryštof Hádek, Matěj Ruppert, Josef Somr, Jolka Krásná, Marek Taclík, Tatiana Vilhelmová, David Novotný.
Runtime	83 min.
Distribution CZ	Falcon
Release date	20 October 2016

A different kind of CGI

The feature film *The Oddsockeaters* was eagerly anticipated by the whole Czech animation community. It is based on the bestselling book by Pavel Šrut and Galina Miklínová and much like with most Czech feature animated films, the production took several years. The waiting was marked by worries related to the film's visuals and the way the Oddsockeaters would look once they were modeled as 3D computer-generated characters. Now it's seven years on and this ambitious film has been released in the Czech Republic and beyond. *The Oddsockeaters* is a sort of revelation, for several reasons. The creators made no effort to compete with American 3D family films. They realized that an inventive approach to the visuals and an original story are more important than having the film look perfect.

The Oddsockeaters in the context of Czech animated feature films

There has long been a discussion about the creators of (not only) Czech animated feature films being in an unenviable position. Some titles spend as long as ten years in production and with some of them there are even worries about them never reaching the finish line at all. The actual production process takes a lot of time and finances, and is demanding when it comes to technology, but the preproduction itself is time-consuming, too—it involves raising the necessary funds and finding co-producers and sponsors. Therefore, in the Czech context, any finished feature film of this type is a sort of miracle. Some of the Czech animated feature films which were released over the last decade are moreover no standard feature films but are rather composed of several shorter parts, like *One Night in City (Jedné noci v jednom městě, 2007)* directed by Jan Balej, sometimes directed by several directors (the *Fimfarum* trilogy) or use several different animation techniques, like *Murderous Tales (Smrtelné historky, 2016)* directed by Jan Bubeníček. At times individ-

ual sections even “depart” for the world and the film festival circuit ahead of the completed film while the creators work on finishing the remaining parts. The Oddsockeaters completely bucked this trend by being a complete film with a single dramatic plot line, a single visual style, a single poetics and a single animation technique.

The Oddsockeaters in the context of Czech CGI

The Oddsockeaters were created using CGI technology, also referred to as “3D animation” or simply “3D”. This technology has hardly any tradition in Czechia; moreover, certain laymen actually feel that the technology is easy to master. It is often said that 3D films allow for sketchy work because things that used to have to be drawn by hand can now be calculated by the animation software. Not everyone is aware that actual modeling involves things like skeletal animations for characters or texture production. Czech animators at the same time do not ignore CGI completely; it is being taught at schools and the technology has been constantly promoted throughout the years by the company Anomalia. Nevertheless, Czech animators earned their global reputation thanks to old-school stop-motion animation—back in the days of Jiří Trnka and his followers—and have been taking advantage of this tradition until the present day. It is also necessary to take into consideration that certain Czech attempts at CGI did not exactly end up successful; a good example of this is the film *Goat Story (Kozí příběh – Pověsti staré Prahy, 2008)* directed by Jan Tománek. Apart from the somewhat lackluster technical side of things, the film suffered from a rather unfortunate vision and lack of clearly defined audience; it was nevertheless seen primarily as a failed “3D” film. A true guarantee of perfect CGI was always seen in the American studios such as Pixar or DreamWorks, which have hundreds of experts working on movie visuals and whose films, which continuously push the CGI envelope, are among the Academy Award nominees year in



and year out. Such possibilities are not even thinkable in the Czech context; the creators of *The Oddsockeaters* nevertheless managed to shoot a technologically advanced “3D” film with a crew of only twenty-five people.

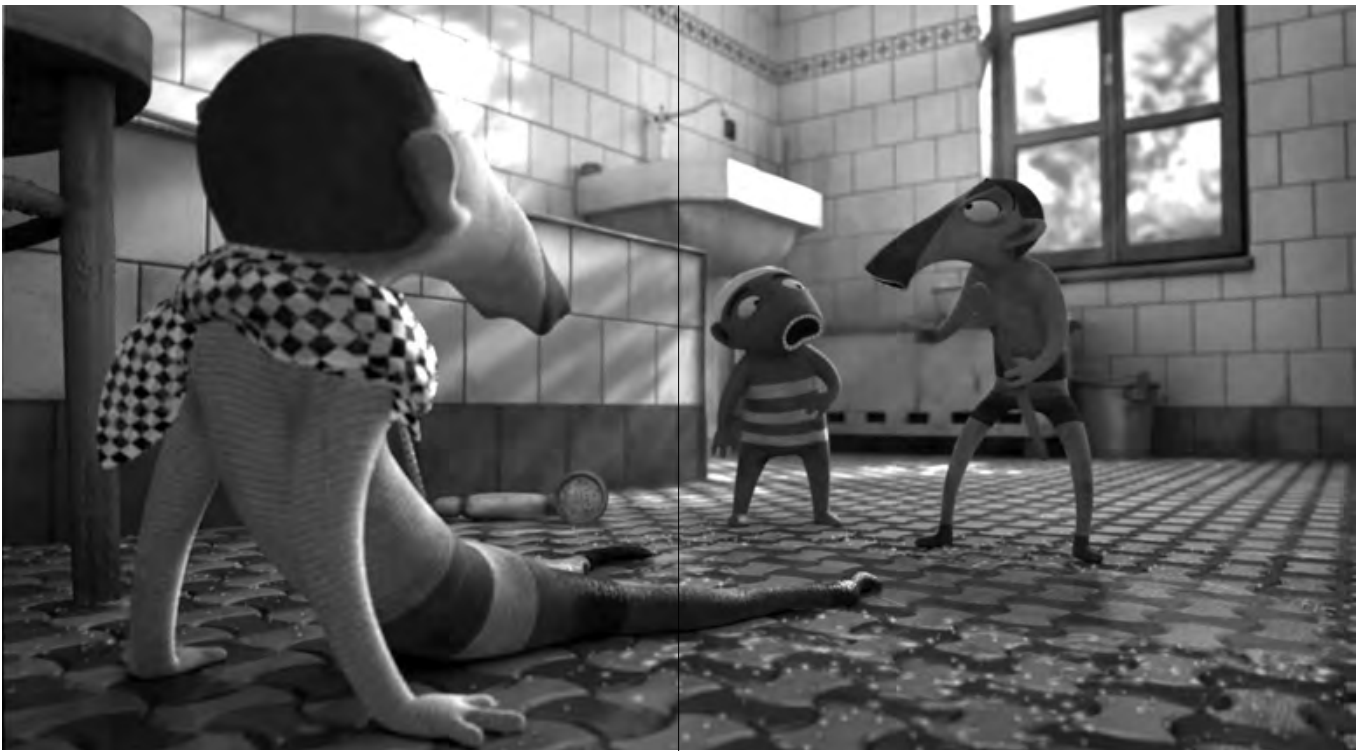
It is interesting to note that *The Oddsockeaters* is the feature debut of Galina Miklínová, of whom few have expected a 3D CGI film. Galina Miklínová first made her name in the Czech animation scene in the late 1990s with her student animated short *Cinema (Biograf, 1997)*. It was followed by another animated short, *Game (Hra, 2004)* another example of old-school total animation which has at each phase been completely redrawn from scratch. She then went on to work on book illustrations and the children’s TV series *About Kanafásek (O Kanafáskovi, 2004)*. Until recently she was seen as someone who works with hand-drawn animation, characterized by being vibrant, authentic and with perfect attention to detail.

The concern that the originally two-dimensional black and white illustrations of *The Oddsockeaters* would lose their originality when transformed into 3D proved to be unfounded in the end. As early as 2014 the director and Petr Horák, the head of the Alkay Animation Prague studio, screened their

early tests at the Anifilm festival. The audience was pleasantly surprised by the fact that the animated Oddsockeaters did not in fact suffer from the sterile and artificial “3D” effect. They changed visually without losing their authenticity. They became colorful and the colors correspond to the individual characters (the good-natured Hihlík is blue, the malicious twins yellow, etc.). Their eyes are now bigger, which made them easier to grasp for young audiences. The book’s illustrations on the other hand are in places dark or even scary. Above all, the film’s sock thieves have detailed textures reminiscent of woven fabric. It is hard to believe that the textures represent the work of mere three people who hand-drew them for the entire film. Less care was put into the character of Professor Kadeřábek, who on the one hand looks similar to characters from mass-produced 3D films and on the other hand looks completely unlike the original illustration.

It is the visuals where *The Oddsockeaters* diverges from the audience’s previous experience with CGI. There are of course American films whose creators gave their imagination creative free rein, like *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010) directed by Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, but *The Oddsockeaters* have the advantage of being a completely original





species. They are not vertebrates; therefore their movement is different and their noses and mouths are combined in a single orifice. They give the impression of something never seen before.

Film versus book

The Oddsockeaters is not a direct adaptation but rather a re-imagining of the eponymous book. The success of the book, which apart from other awards won the 2011 Magnesia Litera prize for Book of the Decade, on the one hand prepared the ground for the film and secured a pre-existing audience, on the other hand however, it put pressure on the creators, especially Galina Miklínová and Pavel Šrut, to meet the audience's expectations. A feature film had to be a great challenge and unknown territory for both—Galina Miklínová had until that point kept her films' runtime under ten minutes, while Pavel Šrut is known as a poet, translator and columnist, an author of books for children and song lyrics, but not as a screenwriter.

The creators likely knew right away that *The Oddsockeaters* cannot be made into a film the way it was originally written. The book is divided into a series of scenes which

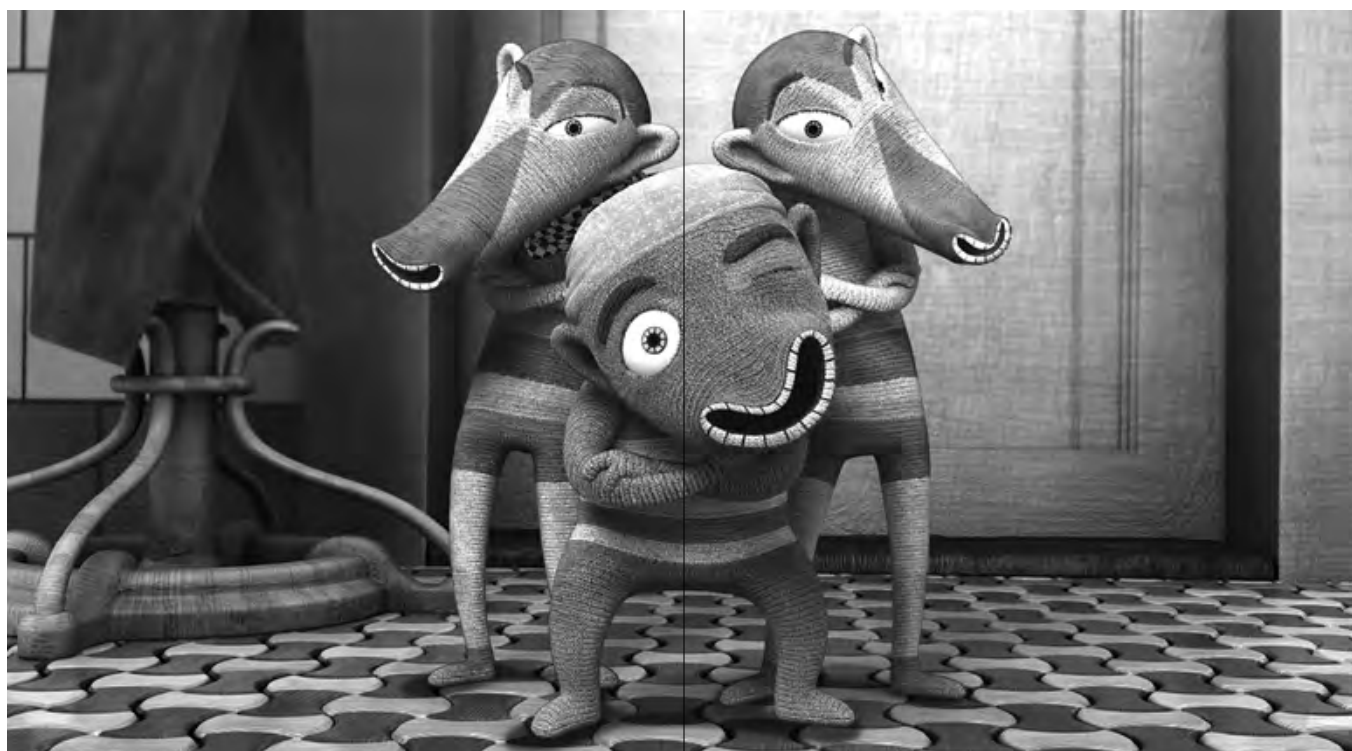
gradually, along with various insertions and detours, combine into a story about the weird creatures who live on socks and the people they meet. Briefly put, the story is narrated in a very generous long-winded way and had to be considerably stripped down for the film. Moreover, the book's narration relies on literary humor which cannot really be translated into the movie.

The hardcore fans of the book will probably be initially confused by the film, whose screenplay was rewritten nine times. There are some characters and, in part, themes from the first and second parts of the book that made it into the film, but the plot is different. The only things that stay the same are the key points of the narrative—the film much like the book is based on the conflict between two Oddsockeater gangs, involving kidnapping and extortion. The settling of differences between Oddsockeaters, much like in the book, is made more complicated by the odd reclusive professor Kadeřábek, who strives to catch the strange creatures, prove their existence and win a Nobel Prize in the process.

The Oddsockeaters in film

The film takes place in the Oddsockeater underworld.





The audience suspects that there are many decent Oddsockeaters who live their peaceful lives in human homes. These however do not appear in the film, unless we count grandpa Lamor and his grandson Hihlík, who is soon attracted to the Oddsockeater underworld. The Oddsockeaters in the film are almost exclusively mobsters who steal socks “at large”, attacking laundries and shopping centers. On one side, there is the traditional mob lead by Padre (also referred to in the book as the “Godfather of all Godfathers”). He may be a cunning sock thief, but he sticks to the Oddsockeater rules and knows which lines should not be crossed. On the other side is the renegade Kudla Dederon, leader of the “Coyotes”, formerly one of Padre’s top “tough guys”. His gang does not hesitate to break the rules, drink copious amounts of alcohol and even resort to extortion.

The protagonist of the film and the book is the naive good-natured Hihlík who is searching for a home and a family. Both sides mistakenly see him as a traitor, he makes friends with the professor and eventually frees his cousin from captivity. The film is more action-oriented than the book and on two occasions (the pre-credit sequence and the final chase on the river) borders in its dramatic character on Hollywood thrillers, albeit with a comedic distance. The tempo is only slowed down by songs.

The Oddsockeaters has a dramatic plot, a happy ending and a (perhaps too plainly stated) message: material wealth is less important than having each other. It can nevertheless hardly be compared to the other movies with the “3D family film” label. This is not only because of the visuals but also due to how original the story is. The world of the Oddsockeaters is on the one hand completely original and has its own rules such as “never take the whole pair” or “keep to people but don’t get too close”, and on the other hand it is the human world in miniature—it has its honest, kind people as well as its misers and irreparable criminals (the book also has homeless and drug-addicted Oddsockeaters).

Further adventures of the Oddsockeaters

There are three books about the Oddsockeaters, so one could therefore also expect a film sequel. The creators however gave different reactions to the question of whether they will make another movie. They might, but not very soon. The major problem is how time-consuming the whole process is. Before the sequel opens in cinemas, the fans of the original film might well be grown up. Another problem lies in that CGI tends to age very fast, because the technology is undergoing constant improvement and development. If the sequel followed up on the original visuals, by the time of release it could easily look outdated. Should the film however be as successful as the book it is based on, we can count on the Oddsockeaters returning to the big screen at some point.

× Malvína Balvínová

Steam on the River (Pára nad řekou, Czech Republic – Slovakia, 2015)	
Directed by	Filip Remunda, Robert Kirchhoff
Written by	Filip Remunda, Robert Kirchhoff
Cinematography	Martin Matíášek, Jakub Halousek, Tomáš Stanek
Runtime	83 min.
Distribution CZ	Bontonfilm
Release date	22 September 2016

Steam on the River as the existential message of Filip Remund and Robert Kirchhoff first entered production roughly ten years ago as a documentary about three jazz musicians who apart from their music share having emigrated from the former Czechoslovakia. The film's title is a metaphor of the transitoriness of life and worldly fame.

They may have originally intended to find out where the artists' lives and careers took them and how, but instead of a summarizing account of lives in music they ended up with a film with profound insights into the search for one's own past and the meaning of life.

We meet the protagonists one by one, in parallel montage, by means of authentic as well as staged or instigated situations. We can only guess when it comes to their glorious past—this is wherein lies the charm of the film's other layer—the protagonists could well be three completely different men who at the close of their lives strive to preserve the dignity of their existence and a certain hope that their lives might not be over just yet.

The very opening scene of the movie hints at its poetics—we will be moving at the borderline between reality, fiction and probability, we will listen to wise, ridiculous and vulgar sentences and watch the protagonists as they, each in their own way, reconcile with old age and musical desires.

The still open and living story of the famous trumpet player Laco Déczi begins with a staged sequence in a bar in New York where he is being arrested by a policeman for playing three out-of-tune notes. Another situation we find him in takes place in a car repair shop where he starts a jam with his black mechanic, then proceeds to pick the biggest and thickest earthworms in a shop with friends, because he intends to go fishing. We see him in a garden as he plays for his own enjoyment with the Italian harmonica player Chris DePino who is a member of his concert band. Laco does not reminisce or look back, it's only the filmmakers who refer to his former glory by editing in archive footage of his past

concerts, then cutting to some of his live shows. The artist inadvertently shows his idiosyncratic nature and attitude to life in the scene with the photographer who is trying to shoot his picture for a poster, in New York with skyscrapers in the background. His story concludes on a big rock a couple of meters away from the sea coast where he recites his praise of folly over one of his paintings.

The message of his story is unambiguous—to live your life, do what you do best and never think of what will remain once the journey is over.

Another storyline is that of the saxophone player Lubomír Tamaškovič. It is his story that introduces the existential level into the film. He is a toothless old man, devastated by life, who falls apart before the audience's eyes as the film goes on and seeks solace in faith. We see him accompanied by a portraitist as well as on his own at home holding the Bible. The key situation however is his visit to Paris for which he left in the 1960s and where he had his glory days. He wanders through the city, looking for jazz clubs where he once played, now long since gone. He even tries to play with Paris jazzmen in an improvised jazz session, but the results are pitiful. His journey concludes with his death, in the film as well as in the real world. The sixty-nine years old musician dies and his friends browse through the handful of things he left behind—an eyeglass case, dentures... He was the one to say that people and all they strive for in life are like steam on a river...

The third protagonist is the double bass player Ján Jankej who lives in Germany. He is given the least space in the film, as he apparently did not want any publicity. His glory days are long gone, he makes some extra money by basking with musicians of his own age and has a hard time paying the rent for his basement room and feeding his parrot. It is he who gives a speech at Tamaškovič's funeral and asks the deceased to save him a seat at the bar in heaven. This is the only time in the film that the fates of at least two of its protagonists intersect.



The narration is nonlinear; the three stories alternate throughout the film to create the feeling of a certain timelessness. The individual situations of the respective protagonists overlap without connection and offer a false sense of continuity.

There are no speeches, no talking heads, no shallow information, only a curious and kind observation, with the old men being inspected almost like some sort of bugs. They are of course aware of the camera but either ignore it, or at oth-

er times, aware of their roles, play their little études for the filmmakers. They do not pretend, they stand there for themselves, the “authentic” actors of their life stories.

There has not been such an engaging testimony on the flowing, fulfillment and transience of life in Czech cinema in a long time. Existential essays are not exactly en vogue in the country.

× Jana Hádková



Normal Autistic Film

(Normální autistický film, Czech Republic, 2016)

Directed by	Miroslav Janek
Written by	Miroslav Janek
Cinematography	Miroslav Janek
Film editing	Tonička Janková
Runtime	90 min.
Distribution CZ	Aerofilms
Release date	10 November 2016

Don't tell us what to do, come and try it for yourself

Normal Autistic Film concludes with the memory of a boy who was asked to tell the happiest story of his childhood. Surprisingly, the story was about the time when he broke his leg and had it in a cast. "Everyone understood what was wrong with me and no one was telling me to man up and stop whining or things like that," he said.

This detail captures the problem in communication with the outside world that autistic children have to face. They are in some respect simply slightly different from the so-called normal kids and get tired of explaining or turning down advice, regardless of how well-intended they may be. The boy thinks that if they had a sign on their foreheads saying "I'm autistic", their lives would be simpler.

Miroslav Janek's documentary feature *Normal Autistic Film* shows that children with autistic spectrum conditions can have content, fulfilled, "normal" lives. The seemingly stiff but probably slightly ironic title of the film anticipates the discussion of what normality is in this context and disarms those who would like to engage in it in advance.

The discussion of whether the protagonists of Janek's film are "normal", or to what degree, is avoided by the screenwriter, director and cinematographer Janek by simply showing them as such. He approaches them from inside, within their own world which he does not try to break them out of, and, except for a handful of exceptions, does not compare them to their environment or some imaginary sample of their peers.

The fourteen-year-old Lukáš is a bit of an exhibitionist, has problems with discipline at schools and enjoys films, which he even shoots with his friend Jáchym. The seventeen-year-old Majda according to her own words hates everything and everyone, has no friends, and vents her defiance against the whole world in hip-hop litanies. Denis, probably slightly older than Lukáš, is a piano virtuoso, takes walks in the countryside and enjoys reading *The Little Prince*. The twelve-year-old Mirjam and her younger brother Ahmed spend most of their time simply having fun with their two "healthy" siblings.

There is next to no interaction with the "outside" world in the film. Janek does not intend to show how the children





deal with their everyday lives; the topic does come up spontaneously every now and then, but the mere fact that the protagonists function in standard institutions (family, school, etc.) proves that they can manage. There are also almost no diagnoses or comments from doctors. Janek works as a mediator between the characters and the audience: the children trust him and he merely watches them as they act. They are on the one hand aware of the director's presence (they address him, show off for the camera) but generally do few things they wouldn't do if the camera wasn't there. Janek already proved his sensibility and ability to win the trust of "non-standard", e.g. blind protagonists in his films *Cha-ci-pe* (*Chačipe*, 2005), *Vierka* (2005), *The Unseen* (*Nespatřené*, 1996), *Hamsa, I Am* (*Hamsa, já jsem*, 1998).

One of the things to take away from the film is that there are more differences between (these) autistic children than there are between them as a group and "normal" children. Lukáš is dominant and talkative, Majda hides behind the mask of a "tough girl", fragile Denis loses himself in art, Mirjam puts thoughts into surprising constellation and Ahmed is guilelessly outgoing. You will find kids like these everywhere. The thing that connects these five children above all else is not autism but rather an amazingly rich inner world which they allow Janek—and thus us—to enter.

Denis for instance "plays" music like a piano and sings in Latin in an amphitheater, while Mirjam with her childlike honesty speaks her mind on the individual parts of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Apart from their developed sensitivity, the characters also show general knowledge which is abnormal (yes, that word yet again) for their age: Ahmed talks with his father about Mars and Denis speaks about Reich's composition *Different Trains*, scattering Janek's doubts about whether he is actually aware that the work is related to the Holocaust in one of film's strong alienating moments.

There are other sequences where the protagonists comment on their diagnosis in a knowing and self-reflecting

manner. "You can't change an aspie, no more than you can teach someone in a wheelchair to walk," says Majda. "Autistic people suffer from sensory overload," states Lukáš. Mirjam describes her inability to understand jokes. They use their typical rationality to speak about situations they perceive with indisputable logic which is nevertheless suppressed in the "normal" world. While her father was teaching Majda to ride a bicycle, he hurled verbal abuse at her, but once she finally learned how to do it, he praised her in front of other people; the girl does not accept the contradiction. Majda is actually the most problematic member of the ensemble cast: her non-stop spouting of hatred of the world and her poetry with rhymes like "shelf-kill yourself" goes beyond the limits of regular adolescent revolt and borders on pathologic.

Apart from Janek, there are also mothers of some of the children who connect the "normal" world with the realm of autism. Mirjam and Ahmed's mother reminisces with a bitter smile about the female doctor who told her that Mirjam (who is of Sudanese-Dagestani descent) suffers from her disorder because her "blood is too mixed". Lukáš's mother on the other hand shows signs of resignation when we see her handling her son's clashes with the school discipline.

Normal Autistic Film stands out in its kind empathy and natural approach to the protagonists and the audience alike: Janek does not try to manipulate those on either side of the screen. His inconspicuous title brings understanding and acceptance—that is to say, exactly those things that the situation cited in the beginning of this text indirectly calls for.

× Vojtěch Rynda

Ice Mother	
(Bába z ledu, Czech Republic 2017)	
Written and directed by	Bohdan Sláma
Cinematography	Diviš Marek
Cast	Zuzana Kronerová, Pavel Nový, Daniel Vízek, Václav Neužil ml., Tatiana Vilhelmová, Petra Špalková, Marek Daniel, Alena Mihulová and others
Runtime	106 min.
Distribution CZ	Falcon
Release date	23 February 2017

***Ice Mother* is all for breaking out of a rut**

Following the box office flop that was *Four Suns* (Čtyři slunce, 2012) which only sold about a quarter of tickets (only a bit over 50,000) compared to his previous titles while at the same time failing to score points with the critics, director Bohdan Sláma found himself at a crossroads—for a while, he focused on work for television, such as the *At the Bottom of the Glass* (Na dně skleničky) episode of the *Innocent Lies* series (Nevinné lži, 2014) and participation on *The Life and Time of Judge A. K.* (Život a doba soudce A. K., 2014), or on the Internet (*The Blaník Bureau* [Kancelář Blaník, 2014–2015]). It took him five years to come back with another film project, *Ice Mother*.

It is easy to see the shift from an interest in destructive, corrosive social circumstances, which Sláma's first films *The Wild Bees* (*Divoké včely*, 2001) and *Happiness* (Štěstí, 2005) concentrated on, towards the more low-key outlines of interpersonal relationships, which either fail or are tricky to initiate, as his primary focus. An especially good example of this is *The Country Teacher* (*Venkovský učitel*, 2008). *Ice Mother* serves as a confirmation of this shift. I would even dare say that rather than a study in relationships, Sláma created something closer to a rather formulaic moral fable on the emancipation of the human spirit. It is an emancipation arc that the aging protagonist Hana (Zuzana Kronerová) goes through, initially clinging to the illusion of being a respectable citizen before she realizes that her worship of “family values” and cooking regular Saturday lunches for her immediate family (grownup sons with their families) has turned her into a housemaid.

The topic of selfless grannies who are being taking advantage of may not be in any way new or original; six decades ago, it was after all dealt with in Bořivoj Zeman's comedy *The Fifth Wheel to a Coach* (*Páté kolo u vozu*, 1958). However, Sláma replaced the social ethos of that film's era with a more believable investigation of the emotional component

in the sense of alienation and selfishness, as well as of that of an uplifting revelation. Hana finds a cathartic revivification in the arms of a homeless-looking ice swimmer Broňa (Pavel Nový) who opens, so to speak, new horizons to her, when she joins him and other ice swimmer in the ice-cold water, discovering a lifestyle completely unlike the one she knew until that moment.

Broňa's guileless spontaneous presence turns her family upside down—it is not by accident that the only one of her flabbergasted and later resentful family members to bond with him is her bullied grandson (the tiny blond-haired Daniel Vízek). Apparently, Sláma is a better director than he is a screenwriter. His story crumbles into disjointed episodes which can be individually interesting (like an acute observation of how the boy bullied at school is ready to treat those who are even more helpless than him—namely his grandmother—in exactly the same way), but there is a lack of a deeper treatment of the connection between them and the action often moves forward based solely on the author's decision rather than due to developments based on the logic of the subplots as rooted in the characters.

The depiction of episodic characters, mostly only hastily sketched out and more or less bizarre or even on the edge of caricature, is itself questionable. What they lack is at least slightly more complex insight into the characters such as would be comparable to the attention given to the pair of protagonists. One only needs to think of the characters of sons (Václav Neužil, Marek Daniel) who are, respectively, barely more than brief outlines of a numb businessman and an ostracized debtor. Similarly flat are Hana's daughters-in-law—especially the one played by Tatiana Vilhelmová who took her character of a woman obsessed with a healthy diet beyond being laughably uptight. This also includes the motif of miseducation that surfaces in discussions that have no limits and wherein it is even possible to admit that grandma smells bad because she is old. Another example is that of the



ice swimmer community, whose raising of chickens in a bus betrays a carelessness due to its only actual focus (ice swimming) with failed attempts to break this up with humor related mostly to the hen Adéla hopping across the table; while in the company of people the hen is supposedly also considered to be human and can even suffer from depressions that lead to a catatonic state.

The film manages better when it tries to find and create resonance in static, almost wordless moments seemingly frozen in time that nevertheless have a certain massive, dramatically effective expressive quality—one only needs to point out the trouble with the constantly smoking boiler incapable of providing heating for the large apartment, or the visit of Broňa's long denied family from the countryside. This of course also includes both protagonists. It has been a while since Pavel Nový had a central role of a loner awakened to emotions, although this time his role is more of a catalyst or a detonator. He is definitely overshadowed by Zuzana Kronerová.

I believe that what she gives here is one of her best performances, along with the breathtaking study of romantic intoxication in Fero Fenič's TV debut *The Banks of Tenderness* (*Brehy nehy*, 1982/1984) which remained banned from being broadcast in its home country for a long time. She is capable of masterful depictions of the subtlest movements of the soul and aroused expectations which at first glance may sometime appear to border on the childish. She does not hesitate to show erotically escalated nudity, inspired by the suddenly awakened desire for carnal experience which she has long since forgotten (and the silent episode with olive oil ranks with one of the most charming miniatures not only in the context of Czech cinema!). She shows that even a person entering old age has their needs and desires, can change

their values and that there is nothing extraordinary about this. This is moreover in relation to the new aim in life which can no longer be derailed by any accident. Her Hana preserves the tenderness expressed by her kind, gentle and caring way of treating others, but her originally almost apologetically submissive manner of speaking transforms into a bold expression of critical opinion. I believe Mrs Kroner is an adept for the Czech Lion film award who can hardly be denied.

Ice Mother, in pointing out various defects hidden behind the facade of apparent order, grabs one's interest by the way it zooms in on a winter city. The pale gray palette of the camera used for both apartment interiors and the frozen riverside as presented by Diviš Marek is however not bleak; its certain dark tone corresponds with the plane of resolve as the point of departure for a subsequent turn. While the slow tracking shots along the landscape or through Hana's apartment hint at the everyday quality of the events and their slow flow among the cast of characters, when there is a submergence of human bodies in water or in the space of an apartment, the conflicts between relatives are accompanied with static close-up (counter)shots of faces or figures. The discreet ambient sounds only serve to reinforce this aspect, while the musical soundtrack with several high-pitched vocals bring an element of disharmony with the overall style. The director at any rate strives not to put too much spotlight on his self-assured handling of the narrative; he takes advantage of the inconspicuous effectiveness of the story and its tragicomic turns and twists, of the movingly embarrassing punchlines. And in this respect, he succeeds.

× Jan Jaroš



Masaryk (Czech Republic – Slovakia, 2016)	
Directed by	Julius Ševčík
Written by	Petr Kolečko, Alex Koenigsmark, Julius Ševčík
Cinematography	Martin Štrba
Cast	Karel Roden, Oldřich Kaiser, Arly Joverová, Hanns Zischler, Jiří Vyorálek, Emília Vášáryová, Eva Herzigová and others
Runtime	106 min.
Distribution CZ	Bioscop
Release date	9 March 2017

Masaryk as a competent exercise in style

The film *Masaryk*, inspired by a key episode in the life of Jan Masaryk and the fate of Czechoslovakia in the years 1938–1939 tries to come off as a highly artistic depiction of its politically charged theme, but fails to achieve actual gravity by means of mere formal ostentation.

“This is what you want to start with?!” says Jan Masaryk to his therapist Stein who begins the session by stating the patient’s date of birth. The audience feel the same way. Masaryk does not start with this scene, but is nevertheless narrated in a manner equally as stiff as conveying key information to the audience by having a doctor recite a patient’s medical history.

The film focuses on the years 1938 and 1939 in the life of the politician, diplomat and son of the first president of Czechoslovakia, the time when the fate of Czechoslovakia was being decided. Masaryk pulls the political strings, uses his connections, struggles with the fallout of the Munich Agreement and the Nazi occupation of the republic, and sees its deletion from the map as his personal failure. At the same time, he fights his personal demons: the complicated relationship with his father, the contradiction between his hedonistic nature and the expectations related to political office, the personality disorder manifested in behavior reminiscent of a teenager. He spends the time immediately before the outbreak of the war in a sanatorium in New Jersey in care of Doctor Stein.

Even though the plot is almost epileptic in how it skips from one point to another and makes it hard for the audience to follow, it is often narrated by simplistic means. “The father decided his fate”, “homesickness” is what we read in the doctor’s notes, things that could have been communicated in a more cinematic manner. Another time, sorrow is illustrated by an aria from Verdi’s *Aida* with the lament “o patria mia”. The viewers first encounter Masaryk at the moment when the diplomat plays the Czech anthem on a piano and sings

it in a trembling voice: yes, he is shaken by the events and under influence of medicaments, but the reaction is still far-fetched. The screenplay rarely shows politicians in situations that are not in some way tense; the performance of Karel Roden, whose visual resemblance to the original even includes the double chin, oscillates believably between these and is worthy of praise.

The film, directed and co-written by Julius Ševčík, expresses banal messages through masterfully executed technical means. The precise editing of Marek Opatrný for instance is used to put together shallow metaphors. Europe is restless—horses in the sty where an important discussion takes place are prancing. Politics is tough—the film cuts from a broken face of a boxer after a match to a rare steak on a festive table over which negotiations take place. Each move can be fatal—a cut to a chessboard.

The cinematographer Martin Štrba excels with color filters and well-thought-out compositions but has to use them to show flat genre pictures such as those of refugees from the Sudetenland taking their wagons over the Manes bridge: a picturesque scene, but where exactly were they trying to get that way? The dynamic editing and sensual cinematography reach their peak in scenes where they are used to create atmosphere rather than pass on profound messages—like the scene of a party in Prague in 1937. In this more light-hearted context, even the not too sophisticated joke with Masaryk sniffing cocaine through a five hundred crown banknote so as not to use the hundred-crown banknote with the portrait of his father, actually works.

Ševčík’s film is like a historical open-air museum where key characters go through a series of vital moments and speak in impressively phrased sophisticated language at the drop of a hat. A substantial part of the work is done by the locations and decorations. Exteriors of the Prague birth center U Apolináře excel in the “role” of an American sanatorium, aided by high-quality effects (the sea within sight). Interiors



of salons, offices and other places where “history is being written” are impressive. The screenplay however forces the action into these locations instead of having the story play out naturally.

The unnatural or even rigid air is a characteristic feature of *Masaryk* the movie. Ševčík does not know how to work with dynamics, he goes all out all the time. He lets the strings roar, metaphorically and literally, has no sense of nuance and uses an in-your-face form of expression. *Masaryk* is in its pathos and exaltedness similar to Filip Renč’s *The Devil’s Mistress* (*Lída Baarová*, 2016); both films take place during the same historical period. Ševčík is specific in his fascination with distortion related to abnormal mental states. His debut *Restart* (2005) was a sprint through a big city seen through the eyes of a young woman trying to make amends for a fatal mistake. In his thriller *Normal the Düsseldorf Ripper* (*Normal*, 2009), Ševčík tried to dissect the soul of a Weimar Republic murderer. Especially the latter of these was drowned in expressionistic aesthetics and cabaret stylization, while both presented shallow attempts at psychological analysis with formal grandeur.

Masaryk’s exaltedness and lack of cohesion tempts one to hypothesize that it is in fact an attempt to show a dra-

matic time in history through the eyes of a mentally ill person, but these features are not systematic enough to support such interpretation. The formal methods on the other hand could be explained by Ševčík’s penchant for cinematic expressionism, but are actually more reminiscent of Hollywood bombast. *Masaryk* would love to create the impression of a film event with potentially national importance, but remains a skillful exercise in effect for effect’s sake.

× Vojtěch Rynda



Filthy	
(Špína, Slovakia – Czech Republic 2017)	
Directed by	Tereza Nvotová
Written by	Barbora Námerová, Tereza Nvotová
Cinematography	Marek Dvořák
Cast	Dominika Morávková-Zeleníková, Anna Rakovská, Anna Šišková, Róbert Jakab, Patrik Holubář and others
Runtime	87 min.
Distribution CZ	Falcon
Release date	20 April 2017

Suicide is contagious

The point of the story is embodied in a narrative loop, woven by the author as a purposeful exemplification of the central dramatic event which occurs in the life of the female protagonist. This is depicted visually by means of a metaphor showing birds as they suddenly take wing in a way similar to how the protagonist, burdened by the nightmare of a personal tragedy, loses her memory due to electroshock. In her feature debut *Filthy* (Špína, 2017) the director Tereza Nvotová does not seek to uncover the dark corners of human psyche but rather follows, in a down-to-earth manner and with documentarian stubbornness, teenage Lena (Dominika Morávková-Zeleníková), her family and close friends, especially her friend Roza (Anna Rakovská), through the lens of hidden guilt—a rape. It is this perspective of guilt which appears to form the central message of the up-and-coming director's cinematic story.

Nvotová shows interest in realism and the authenticity of film narration. Even in her student project *Players* (*Hráči*, 2010) she tested the narrow borderline between an actor's character and their role in life given their shared desire for authenticity, but her film debut is based primarily on a simple premise: the predatory innocence of the math teacher who

self-assuredly and without any inhibitions hurts his student while tutoring her in her own room at her parents' house allows for a painful realization of the violent act's consequences (like Lena's changed behavior) on the part of others as manifestations of something completely opposite, namely guilt, the guilt felt by the victim, and to go on admiring the perpetrator for his innocent beauty and selflessness. Lena bottles everything up inside her and passively watches the helplessness of those around her who are trying to understand, but she does not realize that evil is present even given the most commendable intentions.

A certain formulaic character of the story allows the author to broaden the narrow context of the grave event. Lena for instance has a handicapped brother (Patrik Holubář) who drowns his frustrations in aggressive fits of rage, and a best friend, Roza, who in her naturally selfish concern for her own exceptionality admires precisely the ruthless innocence of the perpetrator who hurt her friend and whom she now begins failing to understand. The film's narration nevertheless relies on the central context of a family environment struck by a serious change (this invites thematic comparisons with Olmo Olmerzu's *Family Film*) and the intentionally realistic character of the film's point of view (which finds its place





in the young Slovak cinema with references to the films of Mira Fornayová or Zuzana Liová). The relationship between Lena and her mother (Anna Šišková), made more prominent to the audience due to its authentic reality, is in its coldness and unwillingness to listen a thematic counterpart to the psychiatric ward where Lena is placed after her naive suicide attempt (naiveté seems to be characteristic of her age group). The collective of characters who are all hurt or deformed in various ways represents exactly this unwillingness to listen, embodied in the asylum by the overall treatment plan which consists of the administration of calming medicaments; similarly, the mother tells her own daughter shortly after the incident to take a pill if she's feeling unwell. Another similarity takes place on the narrative level once the audience is confronted with the meaning of the film's title, which points to the results of said unwillingness, because the dirt that has settled in the head of the protagonist cannot be simply thrown out like the bucket of waste in her family's garden as shown in the film.

The question remains of what are men to take away from the story. Unfortunately, there is a certain double standard in depiction; men tend to be rather weak and inconsiderate—like Lena's father who in his determination to face the aggressor becomes, as soon as he learns the truth, stuck in a caricature of vengeful masculinity locked in between two doors of a tenement building. Or they are innocent looking but in fact weak and cowardly predators when it comes to confrontation with the truth, like the mathematics teacher for whom the film's story draws a trajectory from an uncompromising penchant for helpless girls to a boy-like fear of the burden of accusation made by three teenage students. The desired authentic physicality of suffering is in fact present only in the nocturnal discussions between Lena and her psychiatric ward roommate; the wittily escalated sequence where the girls talk about suicide is later recognized by the audience to be the last desperate call for help which even Lena fails to pick up on.

The cinematography of Marek Dvořák, whose debut as the main cinematographer was the feature film *David* (2015) directed by Jan Těšitel (the two films are further linked by Patrik Holubář who excelled as the protagonist in *David*) shows Lena's suffering by focusing on the gray tones of the environment; his frequent use of long shots with a certain distance from what is shown on the screen supports the strange, occasionally very successful depiction of the cold as felt especially between the mother and her daughter (as in the sequence of the return from the psychiatric ward, which shows Lena from a distance that makes her border on invisibility). The music of the Slovak experimental duo Ink Midget and Pjoni is reminiscent of the industrial music of the 1980s and 1990s with references to Tim Hecker's works.

Filthy is a film, first shown at the Rotterdam Film Festival, which is necessary mostly due to the problem it deals with. It has its qualities, and it does show a certain sophistication in the depiction of what many spectators probably expect to see; in places, it actually breaks out of its own documentary character by using an almost theatrical stylization. What I believe it lacks is a thoroughness which would correspond to what I think was the original intention of having the film speak on an issue which many people still see in a dangerously straightforward manner. While Lena temporarily loses her memory after the electroshock treatment, then has the memory brought back again artificially at the end of the film in order to punish the perpetrator by confronting him with the act he committed, the audience would perhaps prefer the much more terrifying option of having Lena's recollection of the terrible event disappear completely. The collective trust in the efficacy of treatment would thus be turned into a scary depiction of a society caught up in the spell of its own fortitude.

× Michal Kříž

BOOKS



Lukáš Skupa: *Vadí - nevadí. Česká filmová cenzura v 60. letech.*
(Czech Film Censorship in the 1960s)
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Censorship Made Transparent

Lukáš Skupa, a young researcher based in Brno, made the praiseworthy decision to focus his investigations and revision on the existing image of the Czechoslovak “golden sixties”. This focus resulted in his recently published dissertation on the effects of censorship on Czech live action cinema of the period. He approached the topic, which has so far been neglected and never properly explored, like a true historian. Instead of generalizing judgments, fragmentary memories or hand-me-down myths and legends, he studied many sources from the activities of the Film Studio Barrandov (FSB), Czechoslovak Film (CSF) and censorship institutions stored in the Security Services Archive of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (SSA, ISTR), the National Archive of the Czech Republic, the National Film Archive (NFA) and the Barrandov Studio archive. The wide-ranging archival research was completed with information from the period press and interviews with selected witnesses.

The author notes that we still know fairly little about the things that happened in the background of production of many admired films. This is why, this time, he also tried to take into consideration—apart from the creators themselves—the “decisive impact of those who tend to be invisible in domestic cinema—representatives of censorship offices, leading figures of state film and the Barrandov studio or people from the circle of Barrandov creative groups” (p. 17). This approach corresponds to the concept of “industrial authorship” in the case of creative and production process of films as it is investigated by methods of new film history. The past sources on the “Czechoslovak film miracle” however often merely talk vaguely about favorable production conditions or the inspiring artistic atmosphere of this time of social and political liberalization. If censorship gets a mention at all, it is only in reference to the well-known cas-

es. The traditional, inadequate (by now in fact outdated) approach sees censorship as repressive unilateral interventions in a work of art, enforced by censors. Even in the title of his book, however, the author opted for the much more fitting “game approach”, which corresponds with the concept of “new censorship”.

Also using international knowledge on how film censorship works (for instance in the USA, Soviet Union and Poland) he defines a “game” as a censorship communication in the form of negotiation between individual members of the scattered censorship system. This communication-negotiation in the investigated case took place between representatives of CSF, FSB and the censorship offices, that is, the Main Administration of Press Surveillance (MAPS) or the Ideology Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia or other government bureaus. There are, however, only limited written traces or verbal accounts of the censorship negotiation. Many key participants are now dead. The main problem with the reconstruction lies precisely in the secret (classified) character of the censorship process, often obscure for the filmmakers themselves. MAPS as a department of the Ministry of the Interior was active from 1953 without any foundation in law, based only on a government decision. The aim of Skup’s book, however, is to uncover (“declassify”) the censorship system as a whole in the context of the main political, social and cultural changes of the 1960s.

Using organization orders and regulations, the work first analyses and employs tables (diagrams) to “make visible” the very structure of the censorship communication and its players: the method of approval (and auto-regulation) within FSB and the management of CSF, and “players outside of cinema”—the approval system of the censorship bureaus. The above is done for both pre-production and post-production.

“The execution and results of the bureaucrats’ work were highly classified not only with respect to the general

public but also with respect to the actual censorship bureau and its internal records. The concrete orders based on which further measures were taken, were given to MAPS employees by means of confidential talks or phone calls. It is not always possible to find out who issued a given order by phone. We can guess they were probably members of the CC CPC or the MAPS management” (p. 77).

Open mentions of censorship were usually replaced in the public discourse with the term “administrative interventions”.

The following, richly documented explanation chapters are divided based on key milestones—1962, 1965, 1968 and 1970—always in relation to the period development and changes of relations within CSF and FSB, including possible “structural gaps”. The statistics record the most “censorship impulses” (interventions) against the films of Barrandov in 1965, following the liberalization of decentralized cinema planning and a series of creative success mostly by the younger generation. It was the time when the situation with the so-called problem films escalated. The most problematic of these in MAPS’s opinion were *Joseph Kilian (Postava k podprání*, by Pavel Juráček and Jan Schmidt, 1963), *Thirty-Three Silver Quails (Třiatřicet stříbrných křepelek*, by Antonín Kachlík, 1964), *Courage for Every Day (Každý den odvahu*, by Evald Schorm, 1964), *Searching (Bloudění*, by Antonín Máša and Jan Čuřík, 1965) and *The Hero is Afraid (Hrdina má strach*, by František Filip, 1965). The management reacted by implementing a stronger, more thorough inspection in the studio and postponement or suspension of certain projects, sometimes using “economic arguments” when introducing the new system of administration. The so-called experiments for a limited audience were seen as too numerous even though they won awards at festivals and were successful in Western markets.

Starting from January 1967, in relation to the introduction of Act No. 81/1966 on the periodical press and other mass information media, censorship became legalized and MAPS was transformed into the Central Publishing Administration (CPA). The CPA nevertheless adopted the existing rules, i.e. several inspections of film projects during pre-production as well as post-production. There were, however, more and more disputed cases and the negotiations often moved to the higher levels of the censorship systems, to authorities with larger competences. The managing director of CSF, Alois Poledňák, responded to constant party criticism in his report *Certain Problems of Czechoslovak Filmmaking*. He agreed with stopping the series of “critical” and “incomprehensible” films but defended the need for a plurality of opinions and a differentiated approach to cultural politics. The most closely watched films of the period were *Daisies (Sedmikrásky*, by Věra Chytilová, 1966) and *A Report on the Party and the Guests (O slavnosti a hostech*, by Jan Němec, 1966). Both of these were the subject of the notorious interpellation of the MP Jaroslav Pružinec in the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia on 17 May 1967, which also mentioned *Hotel for Strangers (Hotel pro cizince*, by Antonín Máša, 1966), *Sign of the Cancer (Znamení Raka*, by Juraj Herz, 1966) and *Martyrs of Love (Mučedníci lásky*, by Jan Němec, 1966). This speech of the “representatives of the people” was, however, demonstrably inspired by the CC CPC Secretary Jiří Hendrych and head of the Ideology Department, František Havlíček.

The realization of many theretofore “suspended” titles (based on the CPA reports or “preventive action” of the film’s management) was restarted in 1968 when the censorship system started to fall apart (the CPA was abolished in the March of that year). These included *Case for a Rookie Hangman (Případ pro začínajícího kata*, by Pavel Juráček, 1969), *The Joke (Žert*, by Jaromil Jireš, 1968), *The End of a Priest (Farářův konec*, by Evald Schorm, 1968) or *Miss Silver’s Past (Flirt se slečnou Stříbrnou*, by Václav Gajer, 1969), mistakenly listed in the book as *Lion Cub (Lvíče)*, a supposedly never

realized adaptation of a Josef Škvorecký novel. By the end of 1967, during the escalation of the political crisis, filmmakers made independent steps despite the CPA's decisions. In this way, the production of *All My Compatriots (Všichni dobří rodáci*, by Vojtěch Jasný, 1968) was definitively approved during a meeting called by the CSF managing director without the approval of censors.

In the context of the political power struggle for the fate of the reform policies during the so-called Prague Spring, the cultural politics went through substantial changes as well. According to the CPC's Action Program, censorship was to be replaced with more trust put into the filmmakers. (The March of 1968 also saw the end of the CC CPC's Ideological committee.) The invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies and its fallout nevertheless resulted in a turn in this reform process. The change in leadership of CSF and FSB did not ("fortunately") take place before September 1969; therefore the filmmakers were able to take advantage of several more months of decentralization and liberalization. No new independent censorship bureau dedicated to cinema was created.

"While in the past few years, representatives of cinema participated in the censorship communication along with representatives of the external censorship offices, the years 1969 and 1970 were the beginning of the era when such negotiations moved directly into the internal structure of CSF. Such a model was in the given context probably the most effective manner in which to get the situation in cinema reliably under control. The filmmaking plans, scripts or finalized copies were assessed by people who agreed with the normalization era cultural policies. Thus, the system known in the Soviet Union already in the 1930s—a blending of censorship and the film industry—was largely asserted" (p. 164).

More substantial changes in the situation (following the appointment of the general director of CSF Jiří Purš) followed only once the management of FSB was replaced—the creative groups were dissolved (in March 1970) and the planning department was reorganized, now newly subordinated to the central planner Ludvík Toman (with decisive say in questions of filmmaking) and the newly established Ideological and Artistic Committee. The titles approved by the former management of the studio were the first to be "resolved". This is the group that included the "banned films", even though sometimes the creators did try to make changes to avoid trouble. Some titles did not even finish post-production: *Reform School (Pasták*, by Hynek Bočan, 1969–1990) or the supposedly "anti-soviet" *Fools' Ark (Archa bláznů*, by Ivan Balada, 1970–1990). Similarly unfinished and likely physically destroyed was the anthology film *Visits (Návštěvy*, by Vladimír Drha, Milan Jonáš and Otakar Fuka, 1970). An extensive purge was carried out with respect to "ideologically unacceptable" films which were withdrawn from distribution. The new management carried out constant normalization "cleansing" and selection of CSF employees by means of party and employee tests. The "ideological differentiation" was accompanied by obstacles in the workplace set up for supposed adherents of "right-wing opportunism", which included, among others, members of the young generation of creators or activists of the "unruly" Union of Czechoslovak Film and Television Artists (UCFTA), abolished in January 1970.

In his vital contribution to the "hidden history of Czech film", the author reaches the conclusion that the forms and results of the permanent communication between various members of the censorship system (including the filmmakers) "were determined by a number of different factors which could compete with or complement each other" (p. 185). The references to "structural gaps" in the system are of particular value here, often in relation to the personal relationships of the participants. This was especially true of the views of certain employees of the Ideology Department of CC CPC, before the pro-reform Otakar Váňa and Ludvík Pacovský were

replaced by the conservative Miroslav Brůžek and Miroslav Barvík. This communication model helped correct certain deeply rooted ideas of how censorship worked in the given period. "The outlined development took place in close relation to the socio-political and cultural context. The results of censorship negotiations were very closely tied to the promotion or suppression of liberalization tendencies. This disrupts the somewhat ahistorical picture of the 1960s as an era of gradual liberalization of the totalitarian regime with an unchanging cultural and political system" (p. 187). In this respect, Skupa explicitly follows up on the rich research carried out by Karl Kaplan concerning the contradictions, complications and phases of the Czechoslovak reform process.

This mature work, which represents a real breakthrough in the way it is sourced, is apart from interesting illustrations also accompanied with a rich archive supplement. This serves as an example of "censorship in actions" in the form of censorship cards for individual films, daily reports, analyses, telephonic orders or correspondence. It is telling that we also find testimony of censorship aimed at the journal *Film a doba*. The periodical was naturally subject to the continuous attention of MAPS and the party machinery. I have personal recollections of telephone debates between the editor-in-chief Antonín Novák (writing as Jan Žalman) during the approval process of the journal when ready for the printing press for nearly all of its issues, including forced "unnoticeable" changes of text or complete replacement of certain contents. Supplement No. 13 reads: "The *Film a doba* journal has also been publishing articles with the wrong focus, critical of the views and decisions of the party organs [...] During discussions of such defective materials, there were expressions of disapproval on part of the journal's staff" (p. 207). The MAPS's daily report from 23 April 1965 speaks of a ban on the editorial written by Pavel Juráček, an essay on the then-current actions of the "cultural officials" (p. 218–220). I believe it is proper to finally present the banned text written for the journal's issue 5/1965 here in its complete form. (I preserved a print-ready copy.) This serves as a reminder of an age that was in no way idyllic, and about which the reviewed book brings a lot of critical, "revisionist" information, and in which "an unusual number of extraordinary works" (p. 188) were nevertheless produced.

× Jan Svoboda