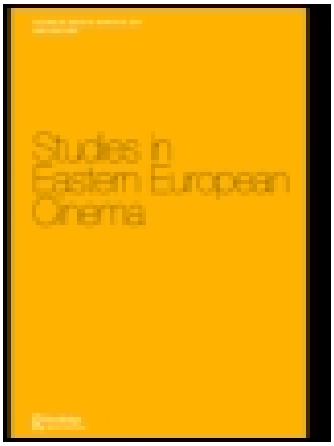

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Reviews

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REVIEWS

RETRIEVING LOST AND FORGOTTEN CINEMA

VIA TRANSVERSA: LOST CINEMA OF THE FORMER EASTERN BLOC, EVA NÄRIPEA AND ANDREAS TROSSEK (EDS) (2008)

Tallinn: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics, 272 pp., ISBN 978-9985-9946-0-3, paperback $35.00

Reviewed by Jonathan L. Owen

Deriving from an international conference convened in Tallinn in 2007, the collection *Via Transversa: Lost Cinema of the Former Eastern Bloc* represents a near-breathless compendium of new approaches, marginalized angles, institutional investigations and cultural excavations concerning the communist and post-communist cinema of Eastern Europe. The book proceeds as if slightly dizzied by its originality, or by the urgency of fulfilling aims already overdue, and its ambitions belie the apparent simplicity, even predictability, that its title might suggest. Yet on the introduction's very first page, 'lost cinema' is emphatically shown to mean not (or not just) banned cinema, and a lot more than forsaken individual titles. Beyond the heroism of the individual auteur, a wider production context is revealed, and as a corrective to the favouring of 'dissident' and modernist cinema in previous studies, many of the texts here examine popular cinema and such marginalized 'ghetto' genres as animation, the documentary, educational cinema and children's films. As much of this cinema was, and remains, genuinely popular, these texts both reveal and strive to bridge the gulf between the academic canon and the collective cultural experiences, and memories, of former 'bloc' citizens. Indeed they also seek to retrieve the lost audience, who are largely absent from former studies, shut out of the Manichean dual that sees film-maker pitted against state. Questions of the native audience's consumption and enjoyment – of that participation or responsiveness that make national cinema *national* – further prove central to the complexities of geography and identity explored throughout.

This retrieval extends to whole geographical regions. There is not much here on Russian cinema, or rather not as much as a previous approach might have deemed necessary. The emphasis is on cinemas that have been 'lost' to critical visibility through their absorption into the designation of 'Soviet cinema', and subsequently 'orphaned' with the dissolution of the Soviet framework. The cinema of the Baltic states exemplifies this condition: marginalized or critically elided with Russia during the Soviet period, the cinemas of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania disappeared from the critical radar almost entirely once unchained from their political master. Yet, if Baltic cinema features particularly heavily throughout this book, this is not only to restore attention to critically neglected areas, but also because these cinemas, which are both nationally hybrid and on occasion nationalistically assertive, are paradigms of two of the book's most important themes: transnational identity and the community-building power of cinema.

I consider *Via Transversa*'s most crucial and exciting intervention to be just this interrogation of existing national or regional frameworks. The exploration of the links between cinemas, nations and regions is all the more timely in that such connectedness is definitely not lost, and continues to augment, in an era of festival auteurs and pan-European funding arrangements. The book examines not only transnational links with the West, but also – this is itself a badly neglected area – connections between different eastern bloc countries. Thus cultural tendencies strongly associated with a particular nation are shown to extend to other contexts, with, say, the 'Czech' speciality of Švejkian pragmatism proving an equally cogent strategy in equally history-ravaged Hungary. More boldly still, the very category of 'East European cinema' is both opened up and broken down, as these texts ponder whether the older Cold War classification should be superseded either by larger transnational entities or by such regional divisions as 'Baltic cinema'. Should regional units indeed now replace national ones, and what of the shifts, differences and internal alterities within East European identity itself: can parts of the East even stand in for 'The West'?

The book is divided into three parts, 'Subversion/Obedience', 'Spectatorship, Nation, Genre' and 'Spatial Politics'. To note that these three sections are not terribly firmly demarcated – issues of subversion and obedience, nationality and genre, resound more or less explicitly throughout the whole collection – is actually to affirm the project's coherence, the various articles' interlocking concerns. It could be said that the first section, 'Subversion/Obedience', attenuates *Via Transversa*'s originality of focus somewhat by returning to the well-trodden territory of censorship, repression and covert critique, and by concentrating on relatively well-known exemplars of 'heroic' artistic dissidence (Kieślowski, Skolimowski, Ryszard Bugajski, Priit Pärn). Yet the contributions manage to twist or expand upon these familiar themes in original and surprising ways. For instance, Katarzyna Maciniak's opening piece 'How Does Cinema Become Lost?' – an essay that might, incidentally, have benefited from a tighter pulling together of its different strands – applies the theme of censorship to the banning of a popular (and pro-communist) 1960s television series in post-socialist Poland. Indeed, Maciniak's essay, like others in this book, intimates concerns that extend beyond those films whose loss was the result of political censorship, and beyond cinema itself: there is also the need to acknowledge and preserve the lost experiential textures and mixed affects of socialist life, and in more accurate ways than through the kitschy travesties of 'Ostalgie' laid on for western tourists.

If Andreas Trossek's 'When Did It Get Political? Soviet Film Bureaucracy and Estonian Hand-Drawn Animation' is not exactly original in its concern with the fearful machinery of Soviet film production, the in-depth empirical research that underlies Trossek's detailed account of animated production in Soviet Estonia, with its dauntingly complex over-layering of institutions and multiple administrative hurdles, suggests a welcome new direction. In fact, *Via Transversa* as a whole displays an impressive range of empirical sources, from personal correspondence to statistics of market share. By examining in detail how the mythified Soviet cinema apparatus actually functioned, Trossek is also able to offer an unusually nuanced reading, one that emphasizes the productive character of this harsh and cumbersome system. Trossek's contention is that the 'imagological shift' in Estonian animation, from children's entertainment to politicized art, was in some way enabled by that very system. Not only did the discourse of 'Soviet dissidence' help elevate those animators whose work was censored or interfered with, but by its vigilance and dogmatism that system also inspired acts of 'quasi-resistance' and an artistic 'double language'. Mari Laaniste's similarly themed 'Pushing the Limits: Priit Pärn's Animated Cartoons and Soviet Cinema Censorship' concurs with Trossek in suggesting that the Soviet system may, perversely, have helped Estonia's star animator, himself presented here in greyer shades as a cautious and sometimes compliant opponent.

The next essay, Maruta Z. Vitols' study of nationalistically oriented subversion in the documentaries of Latvian Juris Podnieks, devotes rather too much space to the theories of de Certeau, while of the two short pieces that round off section one – Natalia Zlydneva's 'The Trace of the Avant-Garde in Soviet Educational Cinema' and Kristel Kotta's 'Why Was *The Mahtra War* Never Filmed? A Banned Project' – Zlydneva's is particularly interesting in illuminating a hidden history of the development of avant-garde aesthetics in Soviet cinema, contained in the ghetto-cum-haven of scientific documentary. The second section 'Spectatorship, Nation, Genre', which directly tackles the crossing of boundaries between nations and genres, contains some of the richest analysis. Both Katie Trumpener's '"When Do We Get Our Cinema?" Stalinist Populism and East German Media Critique' and Petra Hanáková's '"The Films We Are Ashamed of": Czech Crazy Comedy of the 1970s and 1980s' attempt a reassessment of generally maligned periods in the cinemas of communist East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Trumpener's initial thesis is that the GDR cinema of the 1950s, a byword for deadening conservatism, actually manifested 'radical', transformative impulses, as embodied in its repudiation of stardom and glamour. However, compromises were required as a response to the greater lure of West German cinema, hence the appropriation of western genres and modes (both populist and modernist). Yet utopian instincts remained, sublimated now into the self-reflexive critique of the 'capitalist' forms deployed. Trumpener's analysis, though strong, is a little too suggestive: I would have wished for more evidence to support the claim that DEFA in the 1950s 'inaugurated major cinematic transformations' (p. 99) or that Gerhard Klein's films, say, adopt 'New Wave' aesthetics.

Hanáková's more fleshed-out contribution accurately pinpoints the artistic peculiarity of Czech 'crazy comedies', characterized as the genre is by hybridity and a peculiar, non-parodic reformulation of western pop culture. Hanáková makes the provocative yet cogently argued assertion that these comedies, critically overlooked because of their association with the dark days of political 'normalization', exemplify Czech culture better than the privileged

1960s New Wave. This is because stylistic or generic hybridity and the cannibalization of foreign influences are the necessary condition of small, isolated countries eager for a sense of self-sufficiency. The claim for hybridity and transnational 'parasitism' as central to Czech *national* tradition is ultimately convincing, although Hanáková's suggestion that the crazy comedies were a response to the particular isolation and 'recontainment' of the normalization period is weakened by the fact that, as Hanáková herself acknowledges, that genre was established, and some of its strongest works produced, in the liberal and more open 1960s.

Anikó Imre's 'Dinosaurs, Moles and Cowboys: Late Communist Youth Media' also deals with imported western genres. More scattershot than Hanáková's essay and too hastily concluded, this piece nonetheless contains some compelling ideas, not least Imre's suggestion, made while examining the phenomenon of the 'Eastern Western', that socialist culture was not above the Orientalist, imperialist stereotyping of its capitalist counterpart. 'East and South European identities' are finally shown to shift 'ambivalently' between colonized and colonizer, cowboy and Indian. Bjorn Ingvoldstad's 'The Paradox of Lithuanian National Cinema' is one of the book's outstanding texts and the one that addresses its pervasive transnational concerns with most explicitness and clarity. Ingvoldstad's central, paradoxical sounding thesis is that 'Lithuanian national cinema' existed while the Baltic nation was a Soviet republic, yet effectively died once Lithuania regained its independence. Cinema *qua* site of 'imagined community' was all the more vital for communist-era non-sovereignty. In contrast to Kotta's essay from the first section – where the Sovietized production system itself stands indicted for a disconnection between Estonian cinema and its native context – Ingvoldstad argues that Lithuanian national cinema was a victim of resurgent capitalism and a European Union funding structure that virtually dictates a blurring of national identities. Intriguingly, Ingvoldstad moots the idea of European or EU cinema as itself a national cinema, though he says little about what this might entail beyond a pudding-like hybridity.

Two other pieces, more modest in scope, complete the book's second part: Lilla Tőke's 'Idiots on the Ball: Švejkism as a Survival Strategy in the East European Imaginary', which presents the titular figure's anti-idealism, not unproblematically, as a kind of heroism, and the sole kind adequate to the bad carnivalesque of totalitarian (and post-socialist) reality; and Lauri Kärk's '*The Last Relic*: From a Genre Film to a Genre Film', a highly unfocused chapter, yet one that exemplifies the book's aims and then some, taking an Estonian adventure film (with an experimental edge) and charting its affinities with everything from socialist realist images of collectivization to *Tom Jones* and *Easy Rider*.

A more tightly focused third section, 'Spatial Politics', suggests the possibility of charting Soviet or East European film history, that tale of socialist realism and its discontents, through the analysis of depicted space. This is an original approach to the study of eastern bloc cinema and yet one that reconciles the traditional emphasis on political content (which usually means an overriding concern with narrative and representational aspects) with a more formally or visually oriented analysis. Eva Näripea's 'A View from the Periphery: Spatial Discourse of the Soviet Estonian Feature Film: The 1940s and 1950s' makes a particularly persuasive case in showing how the cinematic handling of space and place 'resonate[s] with ideological shifts and Soviet strategies of identity-building' (p. 195). As Näripea charts the translation of political into

topographical domination, Stalinist discourse is shown submitting Estonia's landscapes to the eye of the tourist and conqueror. Space, as organized in socialist realist cinema, emerges a reified, 'tamed' and static space, hierarchically ordered and deprived of its real meanings. The next essay in this section, Brinton Tench Coxe's 'Screening 1960s Moscow: Marlen Khutsiev's *Ilich's Gate*', actually offers an implicit metropolitan and 'revisionist' counterpart to Näripea's analysis, as this study of a film from Russia's Thaw years reveals a corresponding shift in spatial terms: Moscow, the sacralized metropole of Näripea's piece, is rendered in *Ilich's Gate* as an intimate and fluid space, a living, disjunctive and hybrid 'Big Village'. If Ewa Mazierska's 'The Politics of Space in Polish Communist Cinema' appears less immediately innovative, less integrally interrogating of the notion of space than Näripea's or Coxe's pieces, its analysis is more grounded and concrete. Having explored the harsh depiction of tenement blocks in both communist and post-communist films, Mazierska concludes with the tantalizing question of whether these icons of humdrum dystopia will one day be redeemed in the light of new concerns, such as ecology.

The final essay in the book, Irina Novikova's 'Baltic Cinemas – Flashbacks in/out of the House', apparently attached to the third section, serves rather as a reiteration of the transnational themes and questions of territorial designation explored throughout *Via Transversa* as a whole. Yet, Novikova also offers a rush of new ideas and suggestions, couched occasionally in slightly abstruse, terminology-laden language. Advocating the regional category of 'Baltic cinema', Novikova charts the region's kindred cinematic histories through the familiar straddling of political protocols and subtle subversions to an anxiously identity-seeking present. Novikova examines the Baltic presence in other Soviet republics, and shows how the use of Baltic actors in non-Baltic (notably Russian) films reflects a Soviet identification between the Baltics and the 'Western', 'European' and Other. Challenging Lithuanian film-maker Šarūnas Bartas is explored at length a second time, a telling figure not only for his reflections on 'disaporicity', but also as an instance of the contemporary auteur deprived of a native audience.

Several of the longer and more ambitious pieces in *Via Transversa* only barely manage to discipline their multiple directions and ideas, and, poised as the collection generally is between discovery and analysis, a few papers struggle to integrate case studies with cited theoretical perspectives in a thoroughly satisfying or explicit way. Yet the occasional gaps or discrepancies between theory and concrete criticism are an inevitable symptom of the novelty of many of the topics covered, resistant as they may be to existing frameworks or capable as yet of only a partial, provisional absorption into theory. Given the originality and the breadth of these topics, it may seem churlish to demand an even more ambitious and far-reaching approach, one that might look beyond Europe and consider, say, the Central Asian Soviet republics. It should be noted that *Via Transversa* doesn't quite fulfil its transnational remit as extensively as it claims, for I noticed none of the references promised in the introduction to connections with 'brotherly' nations in Latin America, Africa or Asia. Yet it is enough perhaps that such connections are simply stated, and their inclusion may well have made the present text too sprawling and unwieldy.

Indeed, the book is conscious of its status as a spur to further study, and in places directly identifies the often grave lacunae of current knowledge. But even if conclusions are not always fully drawn or theoretical models fully exhausted, these articles have already performed vital work in their defence

and recuperation of critically lost gems and time capsules of socialist popular culture, their introduction of new analytical models such as spatial representation, and their suggestion of new possibilities for the application, or adaptation, of postmodern and postcolonial theory. *Via Transversa*'s single most important achievement though is convincingly qualifying the notion of closed, homogenous national cinemas and problematizing the larger categories so frequently used to demarcate and confine the cinemas of the former eastern bloc. With its transnational concerns and other innovations, *Via Transversa* in essence makes a strong claim for the contemporaneity of East European cinema and its relevance to both film studies and wider debates about European identity, even if some of the present authors would argue that the category itself is passé or redundant.

CZECH TV AND COMPLICITY IN TIMES OF 'NORMALIZATION'

THE GREENGROCER AND HIS TV: THE CULTURE OF COMMUNISM AFTER THE 1968 PRAGUE SPRING, PAULIN BREN (2010)

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 264 pp.,
ISBN 978-0-8014-7642-6, Paperback, £16.50

Reviewed by Jan Čulík, University of Glasgow

This book is more a work of history and sociology than a monograph in the field of film and television studies. Paulina Bren charts the cultural and social history of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia in the two decades from the suppression of the democratic experiment of the 1968 Prague Spring until the late 1980s. She shows convincingly that, in response to the suppression of the Prague Spring reforms, the Czechoslovak communist leadership and the population of the country developed a rather idiosyncratic political culture and the public of Czechoslovakia took to it like ducks to water. I fully agree with Paulina Bren, and I would like to add, on the basis of my own experience and research, that the social mores that originated in the Czechoslovakia of the 1970s and 1980s as a collective response to the Warsaw Pact invasion seem still to persist as the defining features of post-communist Czech society.

In fact, within the context of the unofficial internal Czech discourse, Paulina Bren is not saying anything particularly new. Almost everyone in the Czech Republic knows as relatively banal truths what Paulina Bren has described in this English-language monograph in a persuasive and succinct form. It is commendable that here finally is a study that describes what to Czechs is common knowledge, in spite of the anti-communist propaganda of the Prague media and the superficial stereotypes often disseminated by the press in the West. If this work came out in Czech translation, however, it would serve as a healthy antidote to the persistent, stereotyped propaganda of the Prague-based media, who constantly reiterate the image of life under communism as unmitigated oppression. Paulina Bren rightly casts doubt on the assertion that most people in communist Czechoslovakia were in opposition to the communist regime, that they felt oppressed and

wished to rebel at the first possible opportunity. The situation in post-1968 Czechoslovakia was much more complex and this, by definition, seems to apply also to the post-communist period. To a large extent, this may explain why many Czech citizens feel profound disillusionment from the two decades of post-communism regardless of how intensely the Prague media are trying to convince them that they should be happy because this is the best possible world they are living in.

Paulina Bren has convincingly examined and documented the roots of these attitudes. The 1968 Prague Spring was an exhilarating festival of freedom within the public sphere, during which the media, television and radio in particular showed their enormous power for the first time in history. After the wholesale purges of intellectuals in the first two years after the invasion, the leadership of the Czech Communist Party faced the dilemma of what to do to make the population cooperate with the post-invasion regime. Post-invasion oppression was directed primarily against intellectuals working in the sphere of the humanities, less so against technical intelligentsia, and most of the ordinary people apparently were not oppressed at all if they avoided the sphere of independent political and cultural activism.

After some false starts, Communist Party Leader Gustáv Husák and his colleagues developed a highly ingenious carrot and stick approach, with the help of which they managed to persuade most of the nation to participate in their project. Consumerism and retreat into the private sphere were the most important aspects of this pacification programme, and the nation apparently participated willingly and enthusiastically. Gustáv Husák requested and received financial help from the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1969 and used it to satisfy the consumer needs of the Czechoslovak population. Consumer consumption in Czechoslovakia grew throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Television broadcasting, in general, and the entertainment TV series, in particular, became, as Paulina Bren puts it, 'the golden chariot' of Husák's 'normalization'.

Television entertainment series became an extremely important instrument of propaganda and socialization in this era. This was a time when only two TV channels were available to the population; there was no remote control and no possibility of channel hopping. The TV series consistently achieved stunning viewing figures. More than 80 per cent of the Czechoslovak population watched them regularly, but what is particularly surprising is that some of these communist TV series were highly popular also in West Germany. When the thriller series *Třicet případů majora Zemana/Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*, the primary task of which was to provide a pro-communist regime re-interpretation of Czechoslovak post-second world war history, was screened on East German TV, large numbers of West Germans watched it and the Czech communist thriller series competed rather successfully with home-grown, West-German TV thriller programming. The *Major Zeman* series has been repeated several times since the fall of communism and was recently published on DVD. Commercial companies vied for the lucrative contract. Other communist TV series are re-shown on Czech TV regularly.

Paulina Bren shows that, apart from consumerism and television entertainment, Husák's normalization regime was based on the notion of 'peace and quiet', the idea of fully privatized citizenship (everything was to take place exclusively in the intimacy of one's family and friends; the public sphere was a no-go area because since 1968 it was deemed dangerous and inflammatory) and on the concept of 'socialist self-realization'. Husák's communist

regime was aware that it was unable fully to satisfy the growing consumerist demands of its population, and that the products available were of lower quality than those on sale in the West; but instead of cutting-edge technology, it offered its citizens what it argued was an unmatchable quality of life: better social welfare, 'spiritual values' and inexpensive, communal facilities for leisure activities (one returning Czech émigré from the United States complained that 'there are no public baths in the US, while in Prague, he can go for a swim anywhere just for a few pennies'; other émigrés wistfully remembered how they used to spend summers in the balmy Czech countryside playing basketball with friends, etc.).

Interestingly, Paulina Bren points out that there is a distinct similarity between the value system of the Czechoslovak Husák regime and 'what Lauren Berlant has called the sort of infantile citizenship actively promoted during the 1980s in the United States […] citizenship turned inward and played out within the family sphere, while the media ensured that this is seen as the correct place for it' (p. 149). There is no doubt that the Husák regime in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and the 1980s, and the Reagan regime in the US in the 1980s were both deeply conservative. Dissident ideology did not take root in Czech society. In the first place, dissidents were suspect because many of them used to be enthusiastic Stalinists in the 1950s, and much of their discourse was in the 1970s and 1980s still conducted under the influence of Marxism. The ethical radicalism of the dissident group Charter 77 was alien to most Czechs and Slovaks. Václav Havel's appeals to 'living in truth' fell on deaf ears because most people did not know what it meant. The miniscule dissident 'elite' argued that their willingness to sacrifice themselves for a higher ethical good gave them the right to assume pastoral power over the rest of society. But the rest of society either found this unconvincing or simply did not care.

Dissidents appealed to the general public to stop 'living in fear' and 'speak the truth'. The problem is, as Paulina Bren convincingly shows, that the majority of the population did not feel any fear under Husák's brand of communism. They felt perfectly safe, and the notion that they should be questioning the ideological nature of the regime never entered their minds. Paradoxically, the only people who lived in fear in Husák's society were the dissidents and the communist rulers. Many people were irritated when, shortly after the fall of communism, the dissidents argued that they had the right to lead society 'because they had suffered' under communism. Most dissidents were very quickly eliminated from post-communist politics in Czechoslovakia after 1989 and the people of Husák's normalization took over the positions of power. It is perhaps symptomatic that, eventually, even the dissident philosopher Václav Havel gave way to the Husák's normalization technologist Václav Klaus. Charter 77 is regarded as unpopular and controversial in Czech society today.

The Husák regime, in general, and Czechoslovak Television, in particular, were extremely lucky in securing the services of an extraordinarily talented scriptwriter, Jaroslav Dietl (1929–1985), to put across their political message. Dietl's early work from the 1960s was critical of the communist regime and his TV series *Píseň pro Rudolfa III./A Song for Rudolph III.*, broadcast in 1967–1968, became an emotional rallying point for the Czech and Slovak nations in their defiance of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. (Paulina Bren does not mention this series in her book.) Evidently, Dietl had an exceptional gift of creating the feeling of a shared community, whether his work

expressed the community spirit of the post-1968 anti-Russian defiance or, later on in the 1970s, manipulated the viewing public into accepting the value system of the Husák regime.

As Paulina Bren points out, the initial impetus for producing consumerist communist entertainment television came from East Germany. Most East Germans watched West-German television and the East-German authorities were worried that the West German value system would prevail in their country, so they accepted Western television consumerism, inserted a communist value system within it and started to make popular television entertainment. On the recommendation of the Soviets, the Czechoslovaks began imitating the East Germans. As a result of the 1968 defeat, which outlawed activity in the public arena 'for ever', Czech TV series concentrated on family life. Soviet TV buyers tried to purchase some Czech TV programming in the 1970s, but returned to Russia empty-handed, complaining that Czechoslovak TV product does not deal with life in Czechoslovak society at all – 'it is all about the family' (p. 127).

Paulina Bren shows how Dietl's TV series disseminated and reinforced Husák's new value system in broad outline, but she does not do a detailed thematic analysis of the TV series. Her monograph is written persuasively and cogently; she has a detailed knowledge of twentieth-century Czechoslovak society and her erudition makes it possible for her to draw interesting parallels with work done on the value systems and philosophy of other eastern European societies as well as societies in the West.

There are, maybe, half a dozen typos in the work, mostly in Czech names and titles and also some factual errors and omissions. Contrary to popular myth, Milan Kundera never wrote any odes to Stalin (p. 16). Eduard Goldstücker, the professor of German literature, was never the Editor-in-Chief of *Literární noviny* (p. 23), but it was Milan Jungmann. Gustáv Husák was not Czechoslovak Prime Minister in April 1968 (p. 41), but it was Oldřich Černík. There are several other examples of similar inaccuracies.[1] When discussing the TV series *Třicet případů majora Zemana*, Paulina Bren also omits mentioning an important monograph dealing with the value system of this series, published by Petr Bílek and his students at Charles University, Prague.[2] Paulina Bren's description of Jan Fojtík, the main ideologue of the post-invasion Husák regime, as a cynic and a drunkard (p. 42) is based on an anonymous account that the author found in what used to be the archives of Radio Free Europe. It is somewhat disturbing for a serious work of history that such slander is presented uncontested.

More importantly, Paulina Bren takes passages from Milan Kundera's *fiction* as evidence of historical fact. But, surely, motifs in fiction function differently within the structure of the work than in a documentary, journalistic or scholarly text. It is well known that Milan Kundera is a literary provocateur and that statements he makes in his works of fiction can be construed as deliberate mystifications. Paulina Bren quotes the opening passage from Kundera's *Kniha smíchu a zapomnění/The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, which says that while standing on a Prague balcony during the communist revolution in February 1948, Party secretary Vlado Clementis lent the bareheaded leader of the Communist Party Klement Gottwald his fur hat, as though it was a historical fact. A photograph from that balcony with a fur-hatted Gottwald later became an icon of the communist revolution, but Clementis was executed in a Stalinist show trial and removed from the iconic photograph for political reasons, writes Kundera, pointing out that only Clementis's hat remained on Gottwald's head in the photograph. This story is semi-fictitious.[3]

1. Salivarová-Škvorecká (1993).
2. Bílek (2007).
3. Čulík (2009).

In spite of these minor criticisms, it must be said that Paulina Bren's work on the value system of the 'normalized' Czech society in the 1970s and 1980s and the pivotal role of Dietl's TV series, which disseminated it, is an important contribution to the debate on contemporary Czech history. Although she points out things that most Czechs are fully aware of, it is valuable that this information has now been presented in a single, well-argued publication in English.

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CAUGHT IN HISTORY: REPRESENTATIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN POLISH, CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA

WOMEN IN POLISH CINEMA, EWA MAZIERSKA AND ELŻBIETA OSTROWSKA (2006)

1st edition, New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 244 pp.,
ISBN: 1-57181-948-7, Paperback, £15.00/$25.

MASCULINITIES IN POLISH, CZECH AND SLOVAK CINEMA, EWA MAZIERSKA, (2008)

1st edition, New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 249 pp.,
ISBN: 978-1-84545-540-8, Hardback, £45.00/$90.00

Reviewed by Barbara Klonowska, Catholic University of Lublin

It is a cliché to repeat that in order to understand a particular culture one has to know its history. However, this cliché becomes particularly pertinent in the case of the countries of East-Central Europe, slightly exotic and relatively little known in the rest of the continent. Heavily affected by history and politics, they developed a wide range of cultural strategies aimed at dealing with the traumas of recent and more long-term history, almost incomprehensible for those who did not experience them. The long shadow cast by the loss of independence in the nineteenth century, World War II and almost 50 years of 'real socialism' in the twentieth century, is reflected not only in the artistic representations of the realities of everyday life but also in such seemingly unrelated aspects as the constructions of femininity and masculinity. Therefore, analysing the cinema of these countries from the perspective of gender cannot escape frequent and extensive references to their history and politics, as the most important formative elements conditioning the understanding

of femininity and masculinity and their artistic presentations. Two studies devoted to this subject published by Berghahn Books, *Women in Polish Cinema* by Ewa Mazierska and Elżbieta Ostrowska, and its counterpart *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema* by Ewa Mazierska, are an invaluable contribution here, presenting their subjects against the broader historical and political background crucial for their understanding.

Both studies analyse an impressive number of films (in the case of *Masculinities,* over 300 titles), including the well-recognized representatives of such formations as the Polish School and the Czech New Wave, along with phenomena little known outside of film studies departments such as Polish social-realist movies or Czech comedies of the 'normalization' period. The choice of examples, though it raises some questions presented later in this review, can only be applauded when it comes to its range and artistic status; the films selected are representative, important, if not groundbreaking works fundamental for the understanding of particular cinemas and schools, such as Wajda's diptych *Man of Marble* (1977) and *Man of Iron* (1981), or the movies by Miloš Forman, Jiři Menzel, Jan Hřebejk or Juraj Jakubisko. In both volumes the bibliography of studies used for the analyses is equally impressive, ranging from psychology, sociology and philosophy, and ending with reviews and interviews with the authors of analysed films. Both the number of films included and the quality of this section is the best proof of the excellent research done in order to thoroughly analyse the problem of gender in Polish, Czech and Slovak cinema. This section, together with the Introduction, shows the methodological approach chosen by authors, which is not limited to the discussion of gender in narrow feminist/masculinist terms, but instead, sees it as a product of various other factors such as social class, education, working conditions or material status. The inclusion of this broader social and material context into the analysis of gender is in keeping with the development of feminist theory itself, which, starting with the mid-1980s, began to depart from the somewhat essentialist notion of a universal woman towards a more plural concept of women shaped by particular historical and social conditions. Thus, the presentation of historical and political background turns out to be essential for the understanding of social roles prescribed for men and women in the cinemas analysed.

In *Women in Polish Cinema*, the authors present several such roles. In the case of women this is primarily the mythical Polish Mother, idealized and praised, which constitutes practically the only positive role available to women in Poland. How crippling and limiting this model is becomes apparent from the analyses of films that employ it, showing the price paid for sacrifice and the attendant stifling of emotional and intellectual needs. Another such model is visible in the films expressing social-realist poetics that propose the image of a Superwoman, a Stakhanovite worker and an ideal party member. Finally, the roles of witch or bitch are other examples of images of femininity employed in Polish films. The study presents all of these roles as evolving over time, with particular film schools contributing their own particular models (with that of the Polish Mother being the most persistent), yet the conclusion drawn from the presentation of this evolution is hardly optimistic. Most of these models are unrealistic, ignoring female needs and potentials, and subordinated to the good of the *Patria* and man. With few exceptions, these models are perhaps wishful projections produced by men who would like to be surrounded with such women (or are angry with women if they do not comply with them) rather than any fully realistic portrayals of femininity. Partly, this situation can be attributed to a national history that required all kinds of sacrifices from

both men and women; partly, however, the authors suggest that it might be the outcome of a considerable masculinization of the Polish film industry.

If one was to think, however, that men actually benefit from this situation and that the cinematic images of men are uniformly positive or liberated, the study of masculinities as presented in Polish, Czech and Slovak films as researched in Mazierska's other volume may come as a surprise. Cast in the roles of soldiers, fathers, husbands or lovers, men turn out equally miserable and failing. Ewa Mazierska devotes each chapter of her study to the analysis of these models, each time arriving practically at the same conclusion: faced with the enormous expectations, which demand from them courage, sacrifice, perseverance and maturity in larger-than-life historical circumstances, men seem incapable of rising up to these expectations and usually fail to do so. History is no ally here, as the situations they have to face either make them mad patriots, forsaking everything for the *Patria*, or quite simply cowards avoiding any risk-taking. History takes its toll on their personal lives, too. Mad patriots make poor partners and cowards are hardly model fathers. Both sexes, then, prove helpless in the hands of History that grinds them down, paying no attention to their individual dreams or desires.

Therefore, history cannot be dismissed as merely another factor facilitating the understanding of the films analysed, it becomes the key factor that shapes the construction of gender roles. Interestingly, it also enables the distinction between on the one hand Polish, and on the other Czech and Slovak cinemas, often conflated under the umbrella-term of Eastern European cinema and yet quite distinct. Different historical events and different attitudes adopted towards them, in order to deal with the trauma, may well explain the epidemic of mad patriots in Polish films and their absence in Czechoslovakian ones. Similarly, the different role and status of the Catholic Church in both countries may also account for differences in the attitude to sex visible in their films. Thus, history is both a factor that unites and distinguishes Polish and Czechoslovakian cinemas, and the individual differences between them are equally fascinating.

These differences come out clearly in the analyses of particular films that are another strong aspect of both studies. They offer interesting readings of both well-known titles *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), *Closely Observed Trains* (1966), *The Good Soldier Švejk* (1956), *Larks on a String* (1969–1990) or *A Blonde in Love* (1965) and of those watched mainly by specialists such as the silent *Hurricane* (1928) or socialist-realist films like *The Bus Leaves at 6.20* (1954). In the *Masculinities* volume, especially illuminating are the comparative analyses of Polish and Czech/Slovak films, which bring out both their similarities and peculiarities. Michálek's *Sekal Has to Die* (1998) read against Wajda's *The Sentence on Franciszek Kłos* (2000) convincingly shows unexpected and yet very important aspects of the films, such as the differences between Poles and Czechs when it comes to the problem of romanticism, romantic killing and romantic death. Similarly, in *Women*, the comparative reading of Kędzierzawska's films and those of Ken Loach or Terence Davies is an excellent idea showing similar concerns of both directors, yet achieved via completely different artistic means and with clear political dissimilarities. Illuminating, too, are the observations allowing new perspectives on particular directors. For instance, Andrzej Wajda, probably the most revered of Polish directors, whom the authors themselves call the 'essential Pole' (Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006: 141; Mazierska 2008: 67), after the analysis of his gender strategies, emerges as 'a political opportunist, hardly challenging his audience's deepest views or values' (Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006: 104).

Similarly, despite Dorota Kędzierzawska's numerous declarations of her indifference to feminism, the gender-oriented reading of her films clearly shows that such an interpretation of her work is not merely possible but quite simply irresistible. Finally, the film characters analysed in the studies are frequently read against the grain of popular criticism. Particularly inspiring here is the reading of the evolution of Wajda's heroine, Agnieszka, who undergoes a drastic transformation from an attractive, strong and independent woman in *Man of Marble* into an epitome of the self-sacrificing Polish Mother in *Man of Iron*. This surprising evolution, if not straightforward regression, is indicative of the prevailing hostility of Polish films towards models of female independence. Few to begin with, when they do appear, they are immediately 'corrected' to show the 'proper' way of being a female subject.

The only reservation one can have when it comes to the analyses of films is in the previously mentioned choice of titles. Among the numerous films chosen for the *Masculinities* volume, the most striking omissions are the popular, low-brow genres such as gangster movies, for example, Pasikowski's *Pigs* (1992), romantic comedies and heritage films. Such omissions are probably inevitable if the study is to choose representative examples and still stay within reasonable limits, yet it presents a slightly selective vision consisting of only artistic Polish and Czech/Slovak cinema. Similarly, it might be useful to indicate that the titles chosen for the analysis in *Masculinities* come from the period between 1945 and 2005, and do not include, for instance, pre-war cinema. Another reservation may be connected with the theoretical approach to gender adopted in both studies. While in *Women* the theories employed are those of contemporary feminist studies that reject hard-line psychoanalytical readings as the only method and enrich them with a focus on the historical and social background; in the case of *Masculinities* the theoretical orientation is not equally clear and the study appears eclectic in its choice of theories. This does not have to be a disadvantage; moreover, in comparison to feminist theories, the 'masculinist' ones are only in their infancy, providing a slim basis and dubious tool for analysis. Theoretical eclecticism, however, leads to a somewhat paradoxical situation that even when analysing masculinities, feminist theories are applied, together with sociological and psychological ones. Yet again, this is probably only too natural since, as the authors observe, 'gender operates dialectically: the position of women must be measured in relation to the situation of men' (Mazierska and Ostrowska 2006: 7) and the separation into narrowly feminist or masculinist approaches is in itself an artificial procedure. Finally, both studies are not free from casual imprecisions: for example, the title of Marek Koterski's 2002 film is translated as *The Day of a Nutter* in the 2006 study only to become *Day of the Wacko* in the 2008 one; similarly, the actress M. Teresa Wójcik appears both as Maria and as Magda. As with every published book, these volumes also fall prey to occasional typographic mistakes no careful proofreading can ever fully eliminate. These, however, are negligible points that do not spoil the pleasure and satisfaction derived from the reading of both studies.

Concluding, *Women in Polish Cinema* and *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema* offer an interesting opportunity not merely to learn about a handful of titles and authors; more importantly, analysing the construction of gender in Polish, Czech and Slovak films they turn out to be guides into the intricacies and complexities of the history, politics and realities of everyday life in these countries. Read through the lenses of gender, the analysed films reveal not merely their particular models, but become a sort of entrance into the fascinating realm of a major part of twentieth century Eastern European

history, offering much more than their titles might suggest. Thus, both studies are indispensable guidebooks for any beginner, or indeed any reader interested in Polish, Czech and Slovak cinema, introducing them to much vaster areas of interest than just the particular films. Simultaneously, due to their erudition, wide range of examples analysed, the theoretical framework employed and the ways they lead to often unexpected conclusions, the analyses included in these studies are a valuable contribution to film scholarship and a must for any film scholar interested in eastern European cinema.

Sadly, the conclusions to be drawn from both volumes are rather pessimistic: neither women nor men represented in Polish, Czech and Slovak cinema are shown as happy human beings. Both sexes are subordinated to historically conditioned social myths, which leave them crippled and prevent them from realizing their full human potential. While this cultural oppression has been articulated on numerous occasions in the case of women (implicitly or explicitly pointing to men as benefiting from this situation), the analyses of films included in these studies suggest the opposite: just as with women, men in equal measure might be seen as victims of patriarchy imposed by tradition, maintained by history and politics, and sanctified by the Catholic Church. Few films leave hope that the situation might soon change and the examples of healthy, happy and fulfilled protagonists are an exception rather than the rule. The shadow cast by History turns out to be long indeed.

SEDMIKRÁSKY/DAISIES, VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ, (1966), CZECHOSLOVAKIA: BARRANDOV STUDIOS. DVD (2009)

UK: Second Run, Region 2. Includes: *Cesta/Journey* a documentary on Chytilová by Jasmina Blaževič and trailer. Accompanying booklet with new essay by Peter Hames, length/main feature: 73 minutes, length/special features: 53 minutes, language: Czech with English sub-titles, colour and black and white, format: PAL, Sound: original mono (restored); aspect ratio 1.33:1 full frame.

Reviewed by Benjamin Halligan, University of Salford

At the point of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring, the films of the Czech New Wave had achieved a terminal vision of society that was implicitly specific to their socio-political situation and, formally, apocalyptic in world-view. Chytilová's *Sedmikrásky/Daisies* (1966), often cited as a 'classic' of the Czech New Wave, is the one film that bucked this specificity. Indeed, the film makes a virtue of its removed qualities, and so is perhaps more fruitfully considered in respect of dissident artistic currents outside of Czech cinema – the music of 'The Plastic People of the Universe', for example. And the film's very non-specificity seems to have endeared it to groups, and film enthusiasts and audiences, far removed from the upheavals of Czech society in the late 1960s. Like *Rękopis Znaleziony w Saragossie*/*The Saragossa Manuscript* (Wojciech Has, 1965), a certain psychedelic ambience pervades the film – both films seem existential and yet, *Alice in Wonderland*-like, both are unmoored

from the rules and expectations of familiar existence. And *Daisies*, with its 'happening'-like set pieces and experientialism, fits readily into a programme of underground or structuralist films (such as those of Malcolm Le Grice, the Zanzibar Group or Pierre Clémenti). The film has historically and critically appealed to a constituency of feminist film-goers, but seemingly for more than just its female director and autonomous, anarchically-minded female protagonists. The film's tactile nature and the feminization of the space of the intimate *mise-en-scène* sit readily with the work of Claire Denis, early Jane Campion and Jackie Reynolds.

The film is so widely known and seen that Second Run are to be applauded for releasing it on DVD (and in such a good quality transfer, with retranslated subtitles). The accompanying booklet (an essay from Peter Hames, adapted from his 2005 edition of *The Czechoslovak New Wave*) and extras of a trailer and the 53-minute documentary/interview with Chytilová, *Cesta/Journey* (Jasmina Blaževič, 2004), make the purchase worthwhile for more than just possessing a copy of the film. Second Run's splendid championing of Eastern European cinema, its classics and obscurities, the known and the unknown, and their lavish packaging, deserves the support of academics and film enthusiasts; at the very least, the former can ensure their catalogue is ordered for university libraries. The influx of Second Run titles (where formally video-sourced versions of many of these films would have dated back to the Channel 4 *Banned* season of 1991) serves and bolsters the re-emergence of Eastern European cinema and our critical writing on it.

Daisies consists of a series of vignettes united by the sense of an evolving and picaresque adventure for it two female protagonists (or, perhaps, the split single protagonist; they share the same name). Chytilová junks narrative continuity and frustrates attempts to read the characters, deliberately courting unintelligibility, and so prompting the viewer (and critical writers on the film) towards metaphorical and allegorical readings. Nemes, the closest (in English language scholarship) to an official Stalinist history of East European cinema, finds a fable of two women who have removed themselves from the world, concluding that all protest is useless, only to discover that they have been infected by the ills of the world anyway, (Nemes 1985: 115) – a supremely materialist reading of the film. For Hames, after the protagonists gleefully wreck a banquet, '[their] political attitudes are linked to the world of political destruction, the falling of the chandelier to a nuclear explosion' (Hames 1979: 170). The Liehms see the film as presenting a world stylized by the inner lives of the protagonists (Liehm, Liehm 1977: 285); an accounting for the unintelligibility via psychological realism, *a la* Skolimowski or Polanski of this period. The co-writer of *Daisies*, Ester Krumbachová, claimed the film was about '[…] apathy: the heroines would remain untouched and unmoved even if dead bodies were falling around them' (quoted in Liehm 1974: 280), while for Chytilová herself, *Sedmikrásky* was '[…] a parable on the destructive force of nihilism and senseless provocation' (quoted in Škvorecky 1971: 108). The net result is clearly a film '[t]he point [of which] is to make a single interpretation impossible' (Hames 1979: 171) or, more specifically, '[w]e are presented with a heterogeneous variety of material signs from different systems; the film frustrates our attempts to structure and give meaning to the syntagmatic connections, but at the same time it tempts us to do precisely that' (Eagle 1991: 225).

The film, as Eagle here suggests, comes across as – in the best surrealist manner – an affront to the viewer. *Daisies* simply provokes, having removed

any frame of reference. The destruction of food and displays of public disorder remains seemingly inconsequential, almost puerile. At times the protagonists seem like characters from a silent comedy, flailingly broad in the delivery of their comedic gestures, wide-eyed in their displays of emotions, at times as portraits of modern Czech women, and at times as straight clowns. In a similar fashion, the *mise-en-scène* refuses categorization too: realism is ruptured with the resort to animated sequences, and the film lacks the language of both 'straight' realism and psychological realism; the camera seems constantly to be at the wrong distance from the action, the colours overexposed or scenes underlit, and the composition denied nuance and depth. Such a state of inconsistency and unblinking resistance to narrative sense do not impact negatively on the film which, for the viewer content to overlook the abrogation of such norms, retains a charm and *joie de vivre*. That the viewer would first need to overlook such norms, and is denied guidance, indicates the refusal of Chytilová to subvert from within (as typical of many political film-makers of the late 1960s); no concessions are made to the viewer and the film simply is – so that in part, for Eagle, it has '[…] the spirit of a Dada happening' (Eagle 1991: 233) or, simply, the straight happening (Hames 1985: 211, 216). In much critical writing on the film, the sound design – which is also intrinsic to the disorientation and pleasure of the experience of *Sedmikrásky* – is often overlooked. Second Run's restoration ensures that the pristine print is matched by the full richness of the film's innovative soundscape. The crashes and bangs, the mixing of industrial and (at times) jazz sounds, and the general abruptness of noise assaults, with a proto-looping of aural motifs, is of a piece with Jan Švankmayer's work, and (quite logically) seems to have influenced the sound design of David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1976). It also anticipates the work of drum and bass composer-musician-remixers, such as Squarepusher, ų-Ziq and Aphex Twin.

For all these reasons, rather than any assessment of a narrative-grounded or wider or metaphorical 'meaning' of the film, or message embedded in it, *Daisies* was a contentious provocation too far, and was briefly banned in Czechoslovakia. In 'A Speech by Deputy Pružinec delivered in the National Assembly on 17 May 1967 concerning the film The Daisies by Věra Chytilová', the author and 21 deputy signatories found that *Daisies*, along with *O Slavnosti a Hostech*/*The Party and the Guests* (Jan Němec, 1966), also written by Krumbachová, '[…] have nothing in common with our Republic, socialism, and the ideals of communism […] 'and in this way the films were hostile to their socio-political environment,

> We ask the directors, Němec and Chytilová, what political lessons and entertainment value these films can offer to the working people in factories, in fields and on construction sites. We ask these cultural workers: How long will they poison the life of working people? How long will they ridicule our political achievements?
>
> (quoted in Škvorecky 1982: 99)

These are fair questions, even if posed expediently, or in bad faith, and one still catches oneself baulking at the showiness with which Chytilová has food destroyed in the film. It is the foregrounding of the will to affront that leaves the film open for criticism, and casts Chytilová as a dilettante. Thus in *Pravda* (Dziga Vertov Group, 1969), in which Chytilová is interviewed, she is described as 'like Arthur Penn' – then a modish Hollywood film-maker, whose

work – such as *Alice's Restaurant* (1969) – displayed a will to capitalize on dissenting or countercultural currents, and convert rebellion into sentimentality.

Viewed from the vantage point of the counterculture, *Sedmikrásky* would have readily been accepted as a 'statement', its non-specificity akin to the lack of theoretical rigour and historical analysis of much of the Western cinema of 1968 (The film had a US release in 1967). And in this respect the film could be said to be highly political: these acts of wilful destruction are legitimized as political sentiments in the context of the 'happening' type film that presents them. The non-specific distrust of some element of society, never named or fully identified in the film, that seems to motivate the actions of the women, is then itself deemed relevant for the same reason. It is, here, 'enough' simply to distrust intrinsically, as a philosophical position in itself. Eagle, however, finds in the film's 'field of signification […] the disruption of society's patriarchal order' (Eagle 1991: 225), and extracts evidence of this as a dominant concern; considered in the light of Power's discussion of feminism as the ownership of listed items, the gleeful trashing of material possessions and freedom for the world and its commitments in *Daisies* seems all the more pointed.

Cynicism is clearly aimed at some point outside or beyond the protagonists of *Daisies* – ultimately, this is the dynamic that legitimizes the rebellions, that justifies their record in the film and that extracts and presents these pure acts of rebellion. Despite one final act of mannered inconsequentiality (the film is dedicated 'to all those whose sole source of indignation is a trampled-on triple'), the film demonstrates a will to rebel for the sake of rebellion. As with Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970), the will to rebel becomes the psychological character of the protagonists and the film speaks the language – and delivers the experience – of dissent, without ever allowing a glimpse of the real target of dissent. Perhaps in this respect its banning (or, more precisely, the initial delay of the film's release) and unbanning make a sort of historical sense: to initially silence the dissenting cultural expression (insubordinate, rabble-rousing, diffident), only to welcome it back once the idea of general and non-specific rebellion comes to chime with the preferred reading of Czech dissent in general (youthful, idealistic, perhaps reformist – that is, not anti-Stalinist per se), in preparation for the post-invasion period of 'normalization'.

Chytilová's own post-*Daisies* career has remained frustratingly obscure; only a fraction of her fiction films and documentaries across five decades has been made widely available. It is difficult to think of any other film-makers whose one key work is universally acclaimed, and yet whose entire *oeuvre* remains mostly beyond reach and unseen. Along with the films of Vojtech Jasný, Evald Schorm, Karel Kachyňa, Jaromil Jireš and (especially) Zdenek Sirový, Chytilová's work deserves exposure and will pay handsome dividends to scholars and film historians engaged in critical rediscovery.

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VALERIE'S SEDUCTIVE POWER

VALERIE A TÝDEN DÍVŮ/VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS, JAROMIL JIREŠ (1970) CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BARRANDOV STUDIOS. DVD (2008)

Colour, 73 mins
Aspect ratio (original/DVD): 1:33:1
Sound: original mono (restored for DVD)
DVD special features: introduction by Michael Brooke (20 mins), filmed interview with actress Jaroslava Schallerová (6 mins), trailer (2 mins), booklet with notes by Peter Hames and an appreciation by Joseph A. Gervasi
PAL DVD, Region 0
R.R.P.: £12.99
Second Run DVD 035

Reviewed by Jonathan L. Owen

It is a comment on the peculiarity of Jaromil Jireš's Czech New Wave fantasy *Valerie a týden dívů/Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* (1970) that the film could have been released in the UK by both the sexploitation and horror label Redemption and, in its latest and so far best incarnation, the artistically impeccable DVD outfit Second Run. In addition, Jireš's gently erotic melange of vampire Gothic, Freudian dream-text and knowing fairy tale has proved capable of touching viewers from various contexts and times, from (reportedly) that celebrated English romantic revisionist Angela Carter to the contemporary experimental rock bands Espers and Broadcast (both of whom have paid the film musical homage). The film is a rare case where the terms 'timeless' and 'time capsule' apply in equal measure, and where an immersion in native cultural influences merges with the rhymes and echoes of sensibilities further afield. Clearly the film's seductive power has withstood inadequate presentation on British and American video and DVD versions, my own initial exposure via the Redemption VHS having fortified a nascent enthusiasm for Bohemia's wilder cultural shores. That *Valerie* finally has a release worthy of its wonders can only extend the film's cult and enrich the appreciation of converts.

Perhaps the most beguiling, gossamer-delicate web of images ever spun from early menstruation, Jireš's film is derived from a 1935 novel by Vítězslav Nezval, founder of the still-active Czech Surrealist Group and a poet whose undoubted brilliance has enabled his posthumous reputation to survive capitulation to Stalinism. As critic Michael Brooke reveals in his informative filmed introduction on the Second Run DVD, it was in fact Nezval's staunch loyalty to the domestic communist regime that saw such an apparently non-kosher project win the green light in the post-invasion, newly re-Stalinized Czechoslovakia of 1969. Following at least the letter of Nezval's work quite closely, the film relates the dream adventures undergone by its 13-year-old heroine in the week of her first period, a premise that roots these anxiously adult imaginings in intimations of budding womanhood. Populating these dreams are Valerie's grandmother, for whom vampiric initiation and betrayal of her granddaughter and ward are the price of eternal youth, the lecherous missionary Father Gracian, and the monstrous, black-robed and white-faced vampire Tchoř. The tantalizing mysteries that present themselves – was Valerie's father a bishop, a forester or Tchoř himself, and is Valerie's magical protector Orlík really her brother? – persist and ultimately absorb the entire convoluted story, the film's wilful narrative fogginess complementing cinematographer Jan Čuřík's often idyllically gauzy images.

A visual register of misty pastoralism is infused with heady doses of Fellini- or Jodorowsky-esque carnival and the suggestion of what a German Expressionist film might look like in colour. As several commentators have pointed out, this style and aspects of the film's content skirt the edges of eurotica and sleazy schlock-horror, immense aesthetic craft notwithstanding. Yet such dubious generic flirtations are far from out of step with a Surrealist mentality, for which it is perfectly possible, if not predictable, for trash to mingle with transcendence. Indeed this is specifically in keeping with Nezval's novel, marked as it is by the conventions of the pulp novelette, and the film even excises some of the book's erotic and 'transgressive' elements, such as Valerie's habitual nudity and Orlík's transvestism. At the same time Michael Brooke is right to insist that *Valerie*, though inspired by Surrealism, is not a Surrealist film. Certainly the film's hazy, lulling aesthetic, as tranquil as Valerie herself, lacks the crude, abrasive concreteness that characterizes the movement's post-war Czech incarnation. While it also lacks the harsh, dissonant qualities of other avant-garde influenced Czech films like Věra Chytilová's *Sedmikrásky*/*Daisies* (1966), it does represent the culmination of what might roughly be described as the experimental or fantastic wing of the Czechoslovak New Wave. To my mind, *Valerie* more successfully achieves the interweaving of dream and reality and the evocation of a rapturously demotic Czech inter-war avant-garde than Jan Němec's *Mučedníci lásky*/*Martyrs of Love* (1966). The important screenwriter and art director Ester Krumbachová worked on both films, as well as on *Daisies*, and Brooke suggests, probably correctly, that *Valerie* is as much Krumbachová's film as Jireš's. Like Chytilová, Jireš uses largely unknown actors, a choice that strengthens the film's otherworldliness. The performances here are as much a matter of Eisensteinian typage as of three-dimensional emoting, although Jan Klusák, one of the film's few known faces due to memorable roles for Němec, brings his usual fruity relish to the villainous part of Gracian. Most importantly, Jaroslava Schallerová (an interview with whom is among the DVD extras) possesses a serene, mischief-eyed sweetness that makes her ideal as Valerie.

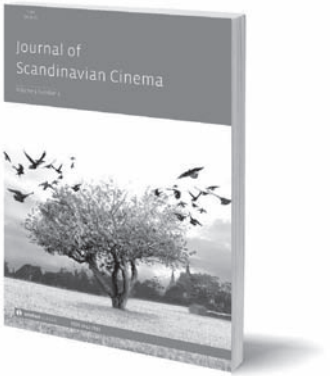
This film is a knowing, even self-reflexive work – the bordering or framing of sexual scenes and conjured desires implicitly ties primal phantasy to the cinematic apparatus, in anticipation of film theory's psychoanalytic turn of the 1970s – and its heavy stylistic artifice, evident for instance in the performers' made-up faces, might at times be seen to verge on camp. Yet such qualities are not sufficient to scupper *Valerie*'s delicately oneiric atmosphere or betray its sincerity of purpose. It is true that the film never really frightens, beyond the occasional momentary frisson, and the supposedly hair-raising events possess a certain insubstantiality, no doubt partly a measure of Jireš's committed recreation of a dream state of shifting and fuzzy connections, abrupt transitions and narrative dead ends. Even Valerie herself seems to apprehend a lack of weight or effectivity in the events around her, drifting as she does through the film in an oddly composed state, a virtual mirror of the model cinema spectator poised between belief and disbelief. In any case the imbibing of magic pearls enables her to abandon any threatening scenario with less effort than the viewer leaving the auditorium. Yet what the film lacks in tension it makes up for in ravishing affect. If the film's knowingness consists also in its profligate use of flagrantly obvious sexual symbols (an elderly farmer's stubbed out cigar is certainly not just that) and archetypal Freudian scenarios, there are as many other scenes and symbols (such as Valerie's forever lost and found earrings) that prove ambiguous or unreadable, and thereby grant the film, together with its narrative ellipses, a genuinely dream-like secrecy (as opposed to the lucid significance of contrived dreams). Moreover, the repetition of particular motifs – blood, apples, flowers and so on – ensures that they transcend, or expand beyond, their symbolic properties and attain a formal role as visual 'themes' or punctuations.

Marked at one level by its fragile self-enclosure, Jireš's film nonetheless has numerous, and pointed, convergences with the real world, that of Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. At the risk of indulging the shop-worn tendency of reducing Czech (or Eastern European) films to 'Aesopian' political allegories, one might point to *Valerie*'s numerous examples of apparently virtuous, benign or protective power that prove destructive and rapacious, a disclosure that could easily include the communist regime in its sweep (parallels between orthodox communism and the Catholic church have been drawn elsewhere, and are suggested here by visual reference to Klusák's role as the clownish secret policeman of Němec's *O slavnosti a hostech*/*The Party and the Guests* (1966)). Yet the sense of something wrong in the state of adult authority might also be linked to broader international patterns of cultural revolt and generational conflict, and (as Peter Hames suggests in his notes accompanying the DVD) the film seen as a more general vindication of playfulness, imagination and irrationality, in contrast to rigid (religious or secular) repression. Is not the film by that token a celebration of irrationality's cultural representatives, the creators of damned, censored and censured art? Take, for instance, the ubiquitous musicians, acrobats and costumed revellers, who in one early scene emerge from a tunnel, in a procession led, appropriately enough, by Nezval's own son: a poignant allegory, perhaps, of the triumphant but brief re-emergence of Czechoslovakia's avant-garde into daylight during the 1960s. Yet the irrational is not always presented with cheery affirmation: its chief embodiment, after all, is the vampiric Tchoř, who stalks through the film's festivities and, like some patron of the forbidden, establishes an underground lair cum bohemian drinking-den in the depths of Valerie's home. Tchoř serves to align the recesses of the psyche not only with violence, but with violent

power, for he is also constable, magistrate and bishop. That Tchoř momentarily succeeds in obtaining Valerie's love and support hints at the reactionary, rather than rebellious, irrationality of popular attachments to dictators and demagogues.

More obvious than any specific political referent is the film's reflection of contemporaneous cultural upheavals, and while from one perspective *Valerie* concerns the fearful dreams instigated by incipient sexual maturity, from another it celebrates 1960s-style free love in its most innocent manifestations. No doubt this is one reason why Jireš's film has proved so fascinating for a certain kind of western audience, including the alt-folk or neo-psych musicians who cherish it today, although Luboš Fišer's extraordinary score, an ethereal blend of children's choirs, harpsichords and jangling bells that is central to the film's effect, is clearly also responsible in large part. The 'psychedelic' surfaces gilding *Valerie*'s psychic depths are particularly compelling for their mix of familiarity and estrangement, their through-the-looking-glass inversion of late 1960s mores. It is probably unintentional that *Valerie*'s protective pearls suggest hallucinogenic drugs (and no doubt accidental too that Rivette's *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974) evokes Jireš's film courtesy of vision-inducing candies as well as witchy, unflappable heroines, white-faced masquerades, familial intrigues and a mysterious house), yet Krumbachová's costume design seems frequently to strive for a style equidistant between the Czech 1920s avant-garde and the counterculture, as if to indicate their deeper affiliations: Orlík, for example, suggests a synthesis of Nezval's 'Straw Hubert' and The Doors' Ray Manzarek. Jireš's is not for all that an unqualified vision of youth and Eros triumphant, and one of the things adding to the film's poignance (and contemporaneity) is its ultimate intimation of a waning idyll, though this is perhaps as much the liberties of the Prague Spring as the highs of hippiedom. If the lush final scenes suggest the dissolution of all fears and antagonisms in a gentle woodland orgy, the dying strains of Fišer's flute already evoke an elegiac or retrospective wistfulness, a sense that the 1960s are soon to be as dead and distant as Nezval's own insouciant heyday.

Valerie's appeal to nostalgia has never been more enticing than on the restored print of the film presented by Second Run, which is devoid of the visual blemishes and clumps of missing frames evident on previous versions: the jerky cuts resulting from the lost frames had both disrupted the film's visual fluidity and made the abstruse narrative even more incomprehensible. In addition, Second Run's characteristically elegant and condensed cover art certainly flatters the film better than the hackneyed Goth irrelevance of Redemption's covers. The DVD extras are few but excellent, although it might have been worth retaining Jan Klusák's tartly humorous interview from the unsubtitled Czech DVD along with Schallerová's. The latter interview, though thoroughly good-natured, evokes the genuine frights of shooting the film's burning scene, while the presence of the actress' mother on set raises the intriguing question of Schallerová senior's reactions to her underage daughter's states of on-screen undress. Michael Brooke's introduction is exemplary in its scene setting and balance of detail, his more factual approach complementing the solid formal and thematic analysis of Peter Hames' sleeve notes (mostly extracted from his indispensable book *The Czechoslovak New Wave*). No previous English-language home release of the film has left us better disposed to try and penetrate its playful enigmas or simply float atop its shimmering surfaces.



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Aims and Scope

Journal of Scandinavian Cinema (JSCA) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to all aspects of film culture in Scandinavia (including Finland and Iceland). The journal aims to become an indispensable contributor to the growth of knowledge about Scandinavian film-making and to provide a stimulating platform for discussions on Scandinavian cinema and its cultural background.

Call for Papers

The editors welcome full-length articles (5,000–8,000 words), as well as shorter items such as interviews, conference reports and commented archival documents. Scholars in film studies, Scandinavian studies, and related areas are invited to contribute articles that reflect their research and teaching interests: articles which will inspire the exchange of ideas and expertise across nations and disciplines.

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