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THE MIRACLE AND THE YOUNG WAVE : Czechoslovakia after 1963

Mira Liehm and Antonin J. Liehm

SUNSHINE IN A NET

"As long as I'm here, this anti-socialist art will not be distributed!" This statement was made in the spring of 1963 by Karol Bacílek, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia, and erstwhile Minister of State Security in the early fifties. In response to this statement, the Film Journalists' Club organized in Prague a special premiere showing of Štefan Uher's film, *Sunshine in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti* – 1962). At just about the same time, a commission composed of political leaders, historians, and political scientists was meeting in Prague. The resolutions passed by this commission resulted in the rehabilitation of the so-called "Slovak nationalists," some of whom had been condemned to life imprisonment in the witch-hunt trials of the fifties. (One of these "nationalists," Gustav Husák, succeeded Dubček as First Secretary of the Communist Party after Soviet troops occupied Czechoslovakia in 1968.) Karol Bacílek soon vanished into political limbo, to be replaced by the unknown Alexander Dubček as the head of the Slovak Communist Party. That year only Czechoslovakia, among all the industrial countries in the world, showed a drop in national income. The total drop was 2.2 percent, industrial production dropping 0.7 percent (agricultural production fell 0.4 percent between 1961 and 1965), and productivity 1.4 percent. What had been the foundation of Czechoslovakia's political stability since 1956 was in an unprecedented shambles.

The history of *Sunshine in a Net* aptly illustrates the direct link between culture and politics in another land where the Spectator was simultaneously the wielder of absolute power and the embodiment of absolute authority. A shock to political power brought about a crisis of authority, and art – above all film – emerged from this crisis into open conflict with the established cultural policy.

Sunshine in a Net was entirely different from practically everything that preceded it. The script rejected the axioms about dramatic structure, turning instead to the inner life of its characters, the complex problems of their intercommunication – the hero's mother, for example, is blind, which forces her to perceive reality through the eyes of others. Uher acted with utter freedom, within the limits of the real world; he cast off all political opportunism and showed on the screen some of the aspects of the true face of economic reality. Stanislav Szomolanyi's camerawork went on to contribute an entirely new dimension of almost surreal lyricism.

Thus Sunshine in a Net became the symbol of the upsurge that at that time was ripening on all fronts. Almost simultaneously with the opening of *Sunshine in a Net*, a program of films directed by Věra Chytilová finally was distributed, after endless delays. The two medium-length films were shown under the title *There's a Bag of Fleas at the Ceiling* (*U stropu je pytel blech* – 1962). In the style of cinéma verité, and influenced by American underground films, the films were on one hand a personal contemplation of the lot of women – *The Ceiling* – a complete departure from past themes, and on the other hand, a sharply-honed, moralizing, sarcastic tract against the hypocrisy of educators in a girl's apprentice dormitory – A *Bag of Fleas* (*Pytel blech*). Shortly thereafter, Chytilová concluded work on her first feature film, *Something Different* (*O něčem jiném* – 1963), one of the best films made in Czechoslovakia in the sixties. In it, she remained true to the cinéma verité method, but she introduced a new philosophical note into Czech film by showing the parallelism of success and failure, the relativity of two totally dissimilar "women's destinies."

PRECEDING GENERATIONS

One thing that was characteristic of the exceptional upsurge in Czechoslovak film between 1963 and 1969 was the fact that although the youngest generation dominated the scene, the "Czechoslovak Film Miracle" was not only their affair. It was as if what three generations had striven to achieve – the prewar generation, the postwar generation, and the "second" generation of 1956 – was suddenly coming to pass in this period. Film-makers of all generations were finally, for the first time, finding it possible to make films the way they wanted, the way they felt they should be made, and to arrive at some measure of self-realization.

Jan Kadár and Elmar Klos pushed directly into contemporary problems with *The Defendant* (*Obžalovaný* – 1964). A classical "trial film," and social-conscience picture, but on a timely theme: three men stand before a court of law, accused of economic crimes. It gradually becomes apparent, however, that it is the nonsensical state economic system that stands accused, accused of punishing people who display personal initiative, take risks, and achieve success in spite of the system. In the film's conclusion, the hero refuses the compromise offered by the court, preferring to return to prison, because that is the only way that he can even hope to see the true culprits finally brought to trial. It was the film audience that became the true judge, and in its open end, the film turns to the viewers as to a court of last resort. Following this film, their most political, Kadár and Klos finally won international acclaim. On the surface, their *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze* – 1965) appeared to be a story of the persecution of Jews in the fascist Slovak state during World War Two. But in fact Kadár and Klos used this plot as a vehicle to express a more universal moral credo – their hatred of indifference and opportunism and of all oppression. Once again they reminded their audiences: "You all share the responsibility, no one can escape from himself."

It was a leading representative of the generation of 1956, Vojtěch Jasný, who declared in 1963 that Czechoslovak film-makers are aware of this responsibility, that they don't intend to keep silent any longer, and that from then on, they would call things by their right names. *Cassandra Cat* (*Až přijde kocour* – 1963) was a modern fairy tale, one of the political morality films that became so typical in those years. Stylized

to the extreme, almost a kind of film ballet, it was the story of a magic cat whose gaze made everyone show his true colors: it not only opened a Pandora's box of taboo subject matter, it also broke the lock on the chest that for so many years had confined visual fantasy. Following *Desire,* it was another pioneering feat, and it was no accident that Jasný was to conclude this era of film-making – after the unsuccessful international coproduction of *Pipes* (*Dýmky* – 1966) – with one of the most significant films of 1968, *All My Countrymen* (*Všichni dobří rodáci*).

The dominant "young wave" succeeded, by means of its elan and its example, in inspiring many of the older film-makers who seemed already to have thrown in the towel. Such, for example, was the case of Otakar Vávra, teacher of many of the young people at the film academy, who in the mid-sixties emerged with two of his very best films, *Golden Rennet* (*Zlatá reneta* – 1965), a portrait of intellectual cowardice in the early fifties, and *Romance for Trumpet* (*Romance pro křídlovku* – 1966), about the drama of growing up in the Southern Bohemian countryside that Vávra had used as a setting in several earlier films. It was no coincidence that the author of the story on which each of these films was based was František Hrubín, the same poet who years earlier had reminded Czech writers of the metaphor of the swan frozen in the ice.

Jiří Weiss and Jiří Krejčík were other members of the previous generations to catch their second breath in this period. In his fairy-tale spectacular, *The Golden Fern* (*Zlaté kapradí* – 1963), Weiss confirmed his somewhat cool mastery of film material. *Ninety in the Shade* (*Třicet jedna ve stínu* – 1966), a psychological mystery aimed at the hypocrisy and immorality of society, made in coproduction with Great Britain, suffered as a result of the misalliance of Czech material and the ambitions of an international coproduction. *Murder Czech Style* (*Vražda po našem* – 1967) took its place in the bitter moralizing context of the sixties. Through the story of a wool-gathering office worker, Weiss attempted to show Czech indecisiveness, pettiness, and opportunism in a mixture of the imaginary and the real. Krejčík was also successful in this area in *Wedding under Supervision* (*Svatba jako řemen* – 1967), which tied in with the tradition of black and grotesque humor that strongly colored his prewar student days. One of his very best films, it was something of a screwball comedy, exposing the dullness of both the old and the new petty bourgeoisie and the representatives of law and order. Later the same year, he made a comedy based on a farce by Sean O'Casey *Boarding House for Bachelors* (*Penzion pro svobodné pány* – 1967), noteworthy above all for the acting.

THE YOUNG WAVE – JIREŠ

In 1963, Jaromil Jireš completed his first feature film, *The First Cry* (*Křik*), which, along with the films of Chytilová and Uher, definitively confirmed that something new was happening in Czech film-making. The young parents-to-be in the film walked onto the screen directly from the street, from the midst of an anonymous crowd that came to life before Kučera's camera, while the anti-hero of the film, dressed in the overalls of a TV repairman, entered the apartments of members of the socialist-realist establishment; his honesty and simplicity functioned as a kind of "truth mirror" making apparent their "new" values and attitudes. Although Jireš made a successful debut in the early sixties, the demands that he made of himself and his uncompromising examination of the present and of future possibilities created difficulties that kept him from realizing any more of his scripts until 1968. During the five-year interim, he made only a few exceptional short films, but his personality remained an integral part of everything that happened in those years in Czechoslovak film.

FORMAN, PASSER, PAPOUŠEK

Almost simultaneously, three names appeared in the mid-sixties that became inseparable in the audience's consciousness: Miloš Forman (b. 1932), Ivan Passer (b. 1933) and Jaroslav Papoušek (b. 1929). Forman made his independent debut with two medium-length films, *Competition* (*Konkurs*) and *If There Were No Music* (*Kdyby ty muziky nebyly*), shown jointly in 1964 under the title *Competition.* His style, which was evident from the beginning, was simple: focus the eye of the camera as closely as possible on human detail, and then put on the screen, in uncensored form, everything that turns up as a result of such a microscopic view. The result of this method, as it became obvious in Forman's later films, was unexpected: in addition to painstaking observations of individual people and their daily lives, another portrait appeared on the screen, a merciless portrait of the whole fabric of society, the like of which Czechoslovak film had never produced before. The whole offered to view an embarrassed, convulsive grimace, a countenance verging on the grotesque; but Forman laughed with gusto and with no condescension at what he saw, and the audience laughed with him, accepting him as one of themselves.

His first feature film, *Black Peter* (*Černý Petr* – 1963), proved Forman's exceptional ability to see in detail, to capture the unrepeatable, small incidents of life, incidents chosen with uncanny insight as being socially representative. Both Passer and Papoušek collaborated on the film. In *Black Peter,* a young boy who is just starting out in life receives his first mission on his new job: to be an informer, to spy on his fellow-citizens, to watch and to mistrust people. As a consequence, a gulf opens between the puzzled boy and his painfully smug father that at the film's end has become unbridgeable. We encounter the same abyss, the same lack of humanity, in the final sequence of the film that made Forman known throughout the world, *Loves of a Blonde* (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky* – 1965). Here also, everything was predetermined from the outset. A small town has a shoe factory that employs hundreds of young women. The army is asked to provide the missing "male element," but instead of the promised garrison of young soldiers, the army stations a unit of middle-aged reservists there. The mixed-up situation made audiences laugh, but at the same time, it revealed the inhumanity of this "problem-solving" approach to emotional human needs. The rest of the film, including the relationship of a young blonde and a touring piano player, was kept within the framework of the basic "problem," bringing *Loves of*

a Blonde onto a plane that the film's creators had not imagined at the start. Miroslav Ondříček was Forman's cameraman.

Černý Petr, Miloš Forman, 1963

Although Passer was considered by some to be Forman's double, his debut, the short *A Boring Afternoon* (*Fádní odpoledne* – 1965) – based on a story by one of the key writers of the period, Bohumil Hrabal – introduced an entirely unique personality. Whereas Forman had a firm and irrepressible confidence in the belief that revelations alone are sufficient for the ends of satire and ridicule, Passer was a melancholy observer, whose laughter contained the mournful element of understanding. His masterful first feature film, *Intimate Lighting* (*Intimní osvětlení* – 1965), was an almost plotless portrait of the tragicomic futility of the life of a provincial intellectual, who is confronted with the almost identical futility of his urban counterpart. This film immediately placed Passer in the ranks of Europe's foremost directors. It turned out, however, that he was not to make another film until six years later, when, as an émigré in the United States, he directed *Born to Win* (1971).

The third member of the trio, Papoušek, whose name always appeared among the credits of Passer's and Forman's films, did not make his independent debut until 1968, with *The Most Beautiful Age* (*Nejkrásnější věk*). Later, in 1969-1971 he made a series of films about the life of a lower middle-class Czech family, *Ecce Homo Homolka, Big Shot Homolka* (*Hogo fogo Homolka*), and *Homolka and the Purse* (*Homolka a tobolka*). His exceptional talent for observation turned out to be more literary than cinematic and under circumstances that had already changed, he did not have the success enjoyed by his two colleagues.

Forman, Passer, and Papoušek destroyed the old conventions of the scenario, striving for a reconstruction of reality not so much by a realistic plot as by means of the acute perception of details of situations and characters. They found in nonprofessional actors the ideal interpreters of the unique moments they brought to life on the screen. This "uniqueness" became the foundation of their esthetic credo.

NĚMEC, JURÁČEK, KRUMBACHOVÁ

Jan Němec and Pavel Juráček (b. 1935) also believed in this uniqueness, and in nonprofessional actors as its main interpreters. But for all that, their approach was almost diametrically opposed to that of the aforementioned trio. They did not use slice-of-life portrayals as their point of departure, but rather the whole, the philosophical fable, a metaphor for which they sought and found concrete forms of expression that frequently were not fleshed out with details until the shooting itself. This was true particularly of Němec and his scenarist and art director, Ester Krumbachova (b. 1923). Němec's feature debut, *Diamonds of the Night* (*Démanty noci* – 1964), still had a realistic foundation – it was based on Arnošt Lustig's story of two Jewish boys who escaped from the Nazis as they were being taken to a concentration camp. But director Němec and cameraman Kučera transformed the story into an almost abstract vision of young people persecuted by a hostile world with which they strive in vain to establish contact – a world that is most tellingly represented by a group of impotent old men in a position of power, who in the end organize a hunt for the two helpless boys. Jan Němec went on to shoot one segment of the episodic film, *Pearls at the Bottom* (*Perličky na dně* – 1965). Hrabal's short stories formed the basis for all the episodes of the film, which brought most of the leading members of the 'young wave' together. But it was *Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech* – 1966), that revealed Němec's full range of talents. Němec transformed a philosophical morality play about man's indifference to the fate of others, about his willingness to accept force and violence, and even to voluntarily become its tool, into a film metaphor, a series of human situations that are experienced before our eyes by "ordinary" people that most of us, the viewers, can identify with. This autoreflection – which was a common trait of the films of the "young wave," along with the effort to capture and demystify social realities – was drawn to its inevitable conclusion when all the "voluntary" participants in that odd, morbid party set out willingly, accompanied by a pack of dogs, to track down the only one of the "guests" who simply couldn't take it and fled the party. The fight to overcome the banning of the film became one of the lessons in the school of practical politics that was attended in those years by all Czechoslovak artists. The struggle ended in 1968, when, at least for

the time being, the film was released for public screening. In the meantime, Němec made *Martyrs of Love* (*Mučedníci lásky* – 1967), three surreal and comic dream stories about the unfulfilled amorous hopes of heroes who had been variously trodden on by destiny. No matter how obvious it was that this film represented a temporary digression from his fundamental concerns – no one imagined that it would be his last film until the mid-seventies – something to fill the gap until he could work with more significant material, *Martyrs of Love* was clear evidence of Němec's maturity, of his ability to give an intriguing shape and style to any film material.

Diamonds of the Night, Jan Němec, 1964

THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES

Another cinematic milestone of Czech film in the sixties was shot from a script by Krumbachová, who also worked on the film as art director. It was *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky* – 1966), directed by Vera Chytilová, who – as did Forman after *Competition* – abandoned the method of cinéma vérité after *Something Different.* Chytilová, with Jaroslav Kučera at the camera, combined fragments of everyday reality with artistic and motion-picture recollections to create an artificial, stylized reality as a setting for her modern fable. The story deals with the inner void, with boredom, with the destructive impulse that these bring into being; it deals with the indifference of the world, and also with people whose indignation in a world of mass murder and silent inhumanity "is reserved for an overturned bowl of salad." When their real-life Czech counterparts were confronted with the finished work, it was almost a foregone conclusion that they would turn that indignation on *Daisies.* Mainly because the film spoke in a language that was almost totally incomprehensible to them – for, as they used to say in Prague, "socialist realism" just a euphemism for "celebrating the Party and the Government in a language that even they can understand"?

In 1970, Chytilová, Krumbachová, and Kučera – in a coproduction with Belgium – completed another of their philosophical visions of the contemporary world, an ambitious artistic parable about women in a man's world, *The Fruit of Paradise* (*Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*). A symphony of surrealist estheticism, not always molded into comprehensible form; a film for the next decade, as one American reviewer wrote.

Ester Krumbachová made her first – and for a long time, her only – independent film, *The Murder of Dr. Lucifer* (*Vražda ing. Čerta* – 1970), at the moment when it was all coming to an end. A sarcastic tract on the myth of maleness, it is practically the only really Brechtian film made in Czechoslovakia during the period. It achieves the necessary "distances," not through cinematic techniques but through acting and staging,

JURÁČEK

Josef Kilian (*Postava k podpírání* – 1963), directed by Pavel Juráček and Jan Schmidt (b. 1934), was not banned like *Report on the Party and the Guests,* but its distribution within the country was limited. A Kafkaesque story that takes place in contemporary Czechoslovakia, it seems almost to foretell the position Franz Kafka was to have in his native land in the sixties. In the spring of 1963, at an international scholarly conference at Liblice, Kafka, long damned by the establishment, was officially rehabilitated. In the eyes of the world, Pavel Juráček, one of the most striking personalities of the period, remained the author of just this one film. His feature debut – a single film consisting of two thematically connected stories – *Every Young Man* (*Každý mladý muž* – 1965), revealed with melancholy humor the alienation of young men in military uniform, and confirmed the existence of an extraordinary talent. But Juráček's major work was to be *Case for a Rookie Hangman* (*Případ pro začínajícího kata* – 1969), inspired by Part III of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* Although the script was finished in the early sixties, the shooting was postponed under various pretexts for years, Juráček, in the meanwhile, helping other "young wave" directors with their scripts. He finally got to shoot his long-awaited film in 1968-1969, but it was completed only for the storage vaults of the post-Soviet occupation censors.

The codirector of *Josef Kilian*, Jan Schmidt, also had to wait more than a year for the opening of his film *The End of August in the Hotel Ozone* (*Konec srpna v hotelu Ozón* – 1966), which was written by Juráček. His picture of a world destroyed by atomic war, a world inhabited only by a surviving group of young women, was too depressing and too desolate for representatives of official optimism and leaders of the military. Whereupon the athletic, anti-intellectual Schmidt – director of a number of

interesting short films on sports themes – tried, within the Czechoslovak context, to create something that was practically unknown there – a romantic action film. His two efforts in this area were *Lanfieri Colony* (*Kolonie Lanfieri* – 1968), and the multi-episode film based on the short stories of V. Vančura, *Queen Dorothy's Bow* (*Luk královny Dorotky* – 1970).

SCHORM

The greater the determination of Czech film-makers to do away with the old taboos, taking advantage of every opportunity that the crisis of the system and the ideology's gradual disintegration suddenly afforded them, the more they found bans, censorship, and the fight against them to be a part of their day-to-day existence. This was the atmosphere at the time of the feature-length debut of Evald Schorm (b. 1931) – who had emerged as the director of a number of fascinating philosophizing shorts. Schorm's *Courage for Everyday* (*Odvahu pro všední den* – 1964) marked the birth of another directorial personality. It brought together the most varied sources of modern inspiration with traditional elements to create a truthful picture of the disillusionment of the postwar political generation. The script was by Antonín Máša (b. 1935).

In his later films, Schorm remained one of the most controversial directors, an uncompromising moralist in the best sense of the word. In his *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (*Návrat ztraceného syna* – 1966), he posed the question that was later to become a supremely important one, particularly in the Soviet Union – is it a sign of social or individual abnormality when the individual's inability to make a moral compromise is classified as madness? In *Saddled with Five Girls* (*Pět holek na krku* – 1967), he re-created a novel for adolescent girls, transforming it into a study of human malice and at the same time pointing up the hypocrisy appearing among the "new class."

MÁŠA

Máša made his debut as the director of *Wandering* (*Bloudění* – 1965), a sharply defined story of the conflict between generations projected against the backdrop of the post-Stalinist period. Shortly thereafter, in *Hotel for Strangers* (*Hotel pro cizince* – 1966), he created, in an *art nouveau* style, a picture of an ivory-tower world that kills a poet who has come seeking sensitivity and truth. This metaphor was replaced by direct political reflection in his next film, *Looking Back* (*Ohlédnutí* – 1968), an attempt at finally integrating the experiences of the last 25 years.

Máša's metaphor about the death of the poet seemed to take up the theme that was expressed earlier on the stage in Ivan Klíma's play, *The Castle***.** The sixties in Czechoslovakia had become a period of renaissance for the legitimate theater, which found – for the first time since the Čapek brothers – true dramatists in Milan Kundera, Václav Havel, Josef Topol, Ivan Klíma, and others. The stage became an important platform for the intellectual destruction of myths and taboos, and at the same time a focus and a departure point for cultural ferment, dominated by the Prague Theater Behind the Arch (Otomar Krejča), Theater on the Ballustrade (Jan Grossman), Semafor Theater (Jiří Šlitr, Jiří Suchý), Drama Club, and others.

Aside from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia was the only country in which the belated de-Stalinization brought with it an exceptional flowering of national literature, bringing to light such extraordinary talents as Fuks, Hrabal, Kundera, Linhartová, Páral, Škvorecký, Vaculík, and, later, Šotola and others. The symbiosis of theater, literature, art, and music with film, in a tense period of anxiety and searching, and in the inspiring uniqueness of the setting that was Prague, indisputably represented an important stimulus to the development of film culture. In many ways it was a repeat of what had happened in the thirties.

MENZEL

This atmosphere also nourished the distinctive and versatile talent of Jiří Menzel (b. 1938) – actor, stage director, and film-maker. His film career was closely linked with the name of Bohumil Hrabal, from the story *The Death of Mr. Baltisberger* (*Smrt pana Baltazara* – 1965), another of the episodes in *Pearls at the Bottom,* through his to-date most successful film, *Closely Watched Trains* (*Ostře sledované vlaky* –1966), to the banned *Larks on a String* (*Skřivánci na niti* – 1969). Hrabal's tragicomic everyday absurdity found a congenial poet in Menzel, who viewed life with an attitude of artful irony, an at the same time with an almost philosophical understanding for the tragicomic non-heroes of his films. Menzel proved equally at home making the film version of twentieth-century Czech classic by Vladislav Vančura, the sagely ironic parable of illusion and reality, *Capricious Summer* (*Rozmarné léto* – 1967). On the other hand, the mystery comedies of Josef Škvorecký, *Crime at the Girls' School* (*Zločin v dívčí škole* – 1965), and *Crime at the Nightclub* (*Zločin v šantánu* – 1968), were too different in style and too abstractly literary to provide Menzel enough specific human for his compassionate irony.

KACHYŇA AND PROCHÁZKA

An entirely different link with literature brought about the successes and the failures of Vojtěch Jasný's former codirector, Karel Kachyňa. By a series coincidences**,** Jan Procházka, a hearty, talented and exceptionally prolific writer, became a favorite of the political leadership for a number of years, and thus gained almost unlimited influence in Czechoslovak film. As time went on, Kachyňa became the sole director of Procházka's scripts, touching with increasing daring on painful and taboo subjects from the past 25 years. Between 1961 and 1970, the Kachyňa-Procházka team made 11 fiction films. The best of them, *Long Live the Republic* (*Ať žije republika* – 1965), looks through the merciless, politically unbiased eyes of a child at a legend of national heroism at the time the country was being liberated from the fascist occupation. Procházka's position inspired and made possible other controversial Kachyňa films, including another provocative of the war, *Carriage to*

Vienna (*Kočár do Vídně* – 1966). This held true until the film *Night of the Bride* (*Noc nevěsty* – 1967), which, in showing the period of the collectivization of agriculture in a most unflattering light, initiated the open conflict between Procházka and the political establishment. The last two films to emerge from this collaboration, *Funny Old Man* (*Směšný pán* – 1969) about a victim of the persecution of the fifties, and *The Ear* (*Ucho* – 1970), about powerful men's horror of the system that they themselves established, were eventually banned. Procházka became one of the targets of the persecution of intellectuals after 1968, and died of cancer in 1971.

Literary works also inspired another member of the young generation, Hynek Bočan (b. 1935), who displayed an exceptional sense of social irony and sarcasm in the films *No Laughing Matter* (*Nikdo se smát nebude* – 1965), based on a story by Milan Kundera; *Private Hurricane* (*Soukromá vichřice* – 1967), based on a novel by Páral; and *Honour and Glory* (*Čest a sláva* – 1969), based on a novel by Michal. Self-irony, a sense of atmosphere, and an intellectual approach to the subject matter were characteristic of Bočan's talent. Contrary to his contemporaries – Bočan inclined more toward traditional cinematic techniques and the use of professional actors.

Carriage to Vienna, Karel Kachyňa, 1966

PRODUCTION GROUPS AND FIFTIES

The reorganization of film production went the furthest in Czechoslovakia between 1963 and 1968, finally permitting film to exist as an art, and allowing the independent development of a plurality of heterogeneous talents and styles. In fact, this production concept became a prevalent notion throughout Eastern Europe, but its realization never quite came to be. What follows applies in varying degrees to all the Eastern European film industries. The basic idea was that of small workshops with a stable state subsidy, the workshops increasingly acting as customers vis-à-vis the studios and the laboratories. The workshops, or production groups, each of which in Czechoslovakia produced on the average of five or six films annually, were headed by a producer-scenarist team, and they each had their own art council**,** while directors were free to work with various groups, depending on the circumstances surrounding the origin of the specific film. The centralized evaluation and approval of films was gradually limited as the production groups' autonomy increased until finally, in 1968, they were entirely independent. The idea was gradually accepted that the entire system of film distribution**,** including the import and export of motion pictures, should be governed by the cultural and artistic role of film, while television would gradually take over the role of the main source of popular entertainment. By 1968, the overall reorganization of film production and distribution was practically ready, having returned to the original concept of a nationalized cinematography that had been altered and realtered over the years.

The gradual success of this reorganization, as well as that of numerous specific films, generated constant friction and tests of strength between film-makers, on the one hand, supported by the majority of film critics, and on the other the still dominant, but shaken, state power, which simultaneously acted as the sole financier. The Union of Film and Television Artists (FITEs) carried the banner of the film-makers in this conflict, becoming**,** as time went on, the first specialized labor organization in Czechoslovakia with the admitted aim of being a partner, and, when necessary, an opponent, to the state in establishing conditions for artistic film work. The key positions in the union in these years were occupied by film journalist Ludvík Pacovský and director Ladislav Helge. The latter, a leading representative of the generation of 1956, and one of the main targets of the 1958 neo-Stalinist counteroffensive, for several years sacrificed his own promising film career to the struggle to create the prerequisites for the film work of others. He did not make a single film between 1963 and 1968, but nonetheless he was the central figure of the Czech film industry. It was not until 1968 that he completed *Shame* (*Stud*)*,* the portrait of a political functionary who is corrupted by power and ends his life as a total failure, the hero of *Great Solitude* 20 years later. From the political point of view *Shame* was one of the most outspoken works of the entire period. This film was unfortunately weakened by Helge's long absence from the director's chair.

BRYNYCH, DANĚK, VLÁČIL

In addition to Vojtěch Jasný, the contemporary of Helge's to achieve the artistic success was Zbyněk Brynych. In ... *And the Fifth Rider Is Fear* (*... a pátý jezdec je strach* – 1964), he used the stories of the inhabitants of an apartment house in Prague during the Nazi occupation as a framework for an expressionistic and entirely contemporary commentary on how man acts in a situation where police terrorism makes ordinary honesty and decency a matter of life and death. Brynych also considered the fundamental questions of political morality in his later film *I, Justice* (*Já, spravedlnost* – 1968), a fantastic story of a group of people who want to make the punishment of Adolf Hitler a matter of their own vengeful concept of justice. Oldřich Daněk, the scriptwriter for *Hic Sunt Leones,* who made his debut as a director in 1960 with the officially irreproachable *Three Tons of Dust* (*Tři tuny prachu*), also turned to history – *The Nuremberg Campaign* (*Spanilá jízda* – 1963) – to seek metaphors for the present. In 1967, Daněk made his best film, *The Royal Blunder* (*Královský omyl*), a fourteenth--century tale about the relativity of despotic power.

Historical material was by far the best medium for František Vláčil, who in 1967 completed his unique reconstruction of thirteenth-century Bohemia, *Markéta Lazarová*, based on the novel by V. Vančura. Supported by the photography of B. Bať ka, he achieved an almost flawless recreation of a period that hovered between paganism and Christianity and filled it with authentic portraits of people from another civilization. But in the last stages, Vláčil unfortunately lost artistic control of the large amount of material, which ultimately lacked the disciplined structure and the orderliness of the poetic original. In this sphere, he was more successful in another historically based film, *The Valley of the Bees* (*Údolí včel* – 1968). The conflict between paganism and Christianity, between two moralities, two civilizations, is once again the central theme. But the things that had made of *Markéta Lazarová* a flawed great work of art, the immediate rawness and the poetic vision, were lacking in *The Valley of the Bees*.

GOOD ENTERTAINMENT

Searching for a new language, doing away with the traditional script and with studio sets – unless a high degree of stylization is needed – viewing film art as a persistent destroyer of myths and a seeker of the truth about man and society – those were the dominant characteristics of Czech film during the period known as "The Czechoslovak Film Miracle," dominated by the directors of the "young wave." The tradition of highly professional, good comedy, musical, mystery, thriller, and adventure story, that had developed over the years, specially in the United States, France, and Great Britain, was entirely lacking in Czechoslovakia and in Eastern Europe in general. From the very beginning, commercial production here was provincial by nature and was aimed exclusively at the least demanding audiences on the domestic market or in the neighboring countries. But under the pressure of an unusually high percentage of artistically ambitious films made by the Czechoslovak film industry, which by the mid-sixties was producing about 40 films a year, as much as 25 to 35 percent of which were beyond the framework of common commercial production, the quality of the so-called entertainment genres also went up.

In 1964**,** the first successful Czechoslovak musical was shown. Called *The Hop Pickers* (*Starci na chmelu*), and directed by Ladislav Rychman (b. 1922), its central motif was the confrontation of middle-aged hypocrisy with the honesty of youth. Director Zdeněk Podskalský came up with a "ghost story," the politically daring satirical comedy *White Lady* (*Bílá paní* – 1965), based on a story by Karel Michal. Another specialist in the comedy genre, Oldřich Lipský (b. 1924), achieved great success with his intelligent but uneven parody of westerns, *Lemonade Joe* (*Limonadový Joe* – 1964). Václav Vorlíček (b. 1930) achieved a good response internationally with his spoof of the comic strips, *Who Wants to Kill Jessie?* (*Kdo chce zabít Jessii?* – 1966).

A turn for the better as far as quality is concerned was also taken by the mystery and adventure film genres. There were detective stories by Petr Schulhoff (b. 1922) – for example, *The Murderer Hides His Face* (*Vrah skrývá tvář* – 1966) – and a mystery with political motivations filmed by Štěpán Skalský (1925) – *The Pathway Through the Deep Forest* (*Cesta hlubokým lesem* – 1964), which revealed the background of one of the most infamous secret police "frame-ups" of the early fifties – as well as the exceptional *Sign of Cancer* (*Ve znamení raka* – 1966), directed by Slovak director Juraj Herz, who was working in Prague. In 1968, Herz made an interesting political horror film, *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*), the story of a "small" man who is transformed by ideology into a mass murderer.

The traditionally important area of films for children and young people was graced with a number of film-makers that raised the overall standards of that genre, including Josef Pinkava, Milan Vošmik, Ludmila Plívová, Jiří Hanibal, and above all, Milan Hobl (b. 1935), who directed Do *You Keep a Lion at Home?* (*Máte doma lva?* – 1963).

In the area of animated films Jiří Trnka added his voice to those of the fiction-film directors with a powerful metaphor about the fate of the artist in a totalitarian society, *The Hand* (*Ruka* – 1966). Karel Zeman continued in his efforts to combine animation with live actors, particularly in *War of the Fools* (*Bláznova kronika* – 1964), but he never could rise to the poetical immediacy of his first great successes.

SLOVAKIA IN THE SIXTIES

After the success of *Sunshine in a Net*, Slovak film did not keep up with Prague. Only Uher fulfilled the hopes he had raised, creating in *The Organ* (*Organ* – 1965), a baroque metaphor about life and art against the backdrop of Slovak fascism during World War Two. Uher's less successful attempt to make a screen version of one of the authentic works of Slovak surrealism, Dominik Tatarka's novel, *The Miraculous Virgin* (*Panna zázračnica* – 1966) is typical of the efforts to find a source for a genuine modern Slovak style.

With his by then usual scriptwriter, Alfonz Bednár, Uher had unearthed it in *Three Daughters* (*Tři dcery* – 1968), a Learian ballad about an old who had put his daughters in a convent in order to avoid having to provide dowries for them, and then, dispossessed as a result of collectivization, sought help from them after the convents had been disbanded. The poetically realistic metaphor once again gave way to the surreal metaphor *Genius* (*Genius* – 1969), which shows the Devil weeping over the fate of Man-Devil and Man have traded places. To maintain their ancient role, the devils set out to convert man. to love and goodness so that he might once again be accessible to corruption.

Uher's peers, Peter Solan, Eduard Grečner, Martin Hollý (b. 1931), and the somewhat older Stanislav Barabáš, formed the vanguard of Slovak film of this period. The older generation of directors (Bielik, Bahna, Andrej Lettrich, Jozef Medveď, Jan Lacko, and others) was capable of ensuring the industrial running of the Koliba studios in Bratislava, but was unsuccessful in wrenching themselves away from provincial standards. But even among the younger generation, many failed to find the means to achieve a radical modernization of language and style: Eduard Grečner did not succeed in *Nylon Moon* (*Nylonový mesiac* – 1965); Solan vainly sought his own approach to portraying the psychological makeup of his contemporaries in *Before Tonight Is Over* (*Kým* sa *skončí tato noc* – 1966), as did Barabáš, who strove for a new existential dimension in his *Knell for the Barefooted* (*Zvony pre bosých* – 1965). Solan, in *The Case of Barnabáš Kos* (*Případ Barnabáš Kos* – 1964), and Barabáš, in *Tango for a Bear* (*Tango pre medveda* – 1966) certainly did not find a compatible genre in political satire. Then, in 1967 they began to make original films for television. *A Gentle Creature* (*Něžná* – 1967) meant the beginning of Barabáš's international career as an interpreter of the work of Dostoyevsky. As for Solan, he directed a penetrating view of the fifties, the medium-length *And Behave Yourself* (*A sekat dobrotu* – 1968). Martin Hollý too achieved his greatest success in Leonid Andreyev's ballad *Seven Hanged Men* (*Sedm oběšených* – 1968), also originally intended for TV.

JAKUBISKO, HANÁK, HAVETTA

But an entirely new note sounded when Juraj Jakubisko (b. 1938), a graduate of the Film Academy in Prague, who as a cameraman shot a promising graduation project in *Waiting for Godot* (*Čekáni na Godota* – 1965), finished his first feature film, *Crucial Years* (*Kristove roky* – 1967). This film signaled not only the birth of an exceptional talent, but also the birth of a Slovak style, with roots in different, more natural, and wilder soil than the style of the Czech young wave. *Crucial Years* is still for the most part an urban film, the story of a painter who, at the age of 33, enters his "age of reason," and finally comprehends that life is compounded of "love, foolishness, and death." What he had only implied in his debut, Jakubisko stated openly in his next film. *Deserters and Nomads* (*Zbehovia a pútníci* – 1968), a wild ballad about war and killing, that deals with "death and obscenity." It is a passionate protest, an eruption of metaphors flowing directly from the imaginative world of surrealism and from authentic Eastern European folklore, still pure and uncommercialized, literally swimming in blood and violence. In this film, Jakubisko discovered a compatible cameraman in Igor Luther and indicated that the focus of seeking and finding a new cinematic language for the forthcoming era of Czechoslovak film might be shifting to Bratislava. Shortly thereafter, two others made debuts as fiction-film directors, the documentarist Dušan Hanák,, and the former graphic artist Elo Havetta (d. 1975). Their appearance confirmed the originality of the contribution of the new generation from Slovakia. In his film *322* (1968), Hanák presented a parallel between the cancer that eats away at the guts of the film's hero and the cancer that destroys human relations and the social tissue. Havetta, on the other hand, in his *Party in the Botanical Garden* (*Slávnost' v botanickej záhrade* – 1969) proclaimed an anarchist joy in an unwarped, undistorted life, a protest against pettiness. It was a film full of surreal images that drew their inspiration from the rural life of the Slovakian hill country.

IMAGES OF "CONCRETE TOTALITY"

It took only five years (1963-1968) for Czech and Slovak film artists to lead the Czechoslovak film industry to one of the leading positions in Europe. The young generation, just entering upon the scene in those years, was dominant, but – as mentioned before – in essence the achievement resulted from the efforts of all generations, which up until then had been repeatedly frustrated and constrained by political and administrative forces. Thus, in the second half of the sixties, Czechoslovakia had a number of film directors of European renown, united in their opposition to those who would either restrict their originality or fetter them with endless delays in production or distribution. Together with all of Czechoslovak culture, with scholars of the humanities, with the economists, the best of the journalists, and, in the final stages, with the contribution of some members of the political establishment**,** Czechoslovak film played a significant role in laying the cultural and social groundwork for what was to become known as "the Prague Spring of 1968." But it was not until 1968, when all censorship had been withdrawn and production groups had attained full autonomy that the Czechoslovak films would cease to be just partial analyses and trial ballons and would create a portrait of what philosopher Karl Kosík referred to as the **"**concrete totality" of the Stalinist world. These films included Forman's *Firemen's Ball* (*Hoří, má panenko!),* which was completed in 1967 and was an extended Gogolian metaphor about stupidity, dullness, and incapacity. In it, its authors brought to the extreme their method of using the concrete reality of detail – in this case the world of the provincial functionaries of a fire brigade – to reveal the truth behind it, the truth about social system as a whole. The film opened in movie theaters on December 15, 1967, at the moment when a political crisis was coming to head – the crisis that was to bring Alexander Dubček and his reform to power in the first week of January, 1968.

Other films in this unique series of "total" views of the previous period did not enter production until later in 1968 – even though the scripts had long since been

ready for shooting – and they were not completed until the armed intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968 brought an end to the period that had permitted them to come into being. Thus, paradoxically, 1969 became the year in which the efforts of the years past came to fruition, and simultaneously the year in which they were frustrated. Jaromil Jireš completed the brutally realistic *Joke* (*Žert*), based on the novel by Milan Kundera, in which a man who had been among the revolutionary youth of the postwar period comes to bitter terms with events of those days and of his young adulthood. In *The End of a Priest* (*Konec faráře*), Evald Schorm used the script by J. Škvorecký to view under a magnifying glass a grotesque world distorted by ideologies that also hide the real human beings behind them. In his lyrically melancholy *All My Countrymen,* Vojtěch Jasný erected a mournful and nostalgic monument to the wasted lives of his friends from a Moravian village, who after the war worked with him for a "better life." And finally, in Slovakia, Juraj Jakubisko made his third film, *Birds, Orphans, and Fools* (*Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni*), a desperate scream of protest against the brutal absurdity of the world, declaring: "When soldiers invade your country and steal your house and your language, if you build yourself a house in your soul, you will be happy." The hero of the film – just to be on the safe side – commits threefold suicide.

"NORMALIZATION"

The so-called normalization of Czechoslovakia following 1969 also meant an end to the Czechoslovak film miracle. The General Manager of Czechoslovak Film was arrested; Radok, Kadár, Weiss, Jasný, Barabáš, Forman, Passer, Luter and others went abroad, later joined by Němec, while other leading directors of the sixties were fired by Czechoslovak Film. Only Jaromil Jireš was to shoot two of his long-prepared scripts. One of them was *Valerie and the Week of Wonders* (*Valerie a týden divů* – 1969), an excellent poetic vampire film based on a story full of childhood fantasies the Czech surrealist poet of the twenties, Vítězslav Nezval. The other was *And Give My Love to the Swallows* (*A pozdravujte vlaštovky* – 1971), a lyrical, stylized story based on the diaries of a 17-year-old girl who was executed during the Nazi occupation.

It was with far less success that Juraj Herz escaped into the unreal world of art nouveau and made *Kerosene Lamps* (*Petrolejové lampy* – 1971) and *Morgiana* (1972), while Karel Kachyňa returned to films for youth with *Jumping the Puddles Again* (*Už zase skáču přes kaluže* – 1971), and *Destination Heaven* (*Vlak do stanice nebe* – 1973). And the censors' vaults swallowed not only such finished films as Jiří Menzel's *Larks on a String,* Pavel Juráček's *Case for a Rookie Hangman,* Evald Schorm's *The Seventh Day, Eighth Night* (*Sedmý den, osmá noc*) and *Dogs and People* (*Psi a lidé*), which he codirected with Vojtěch Jasný, Karel Kachyňa's *The Ear,* Hynek Bočan's *Reformatory* (*Pasťák*), and others – all works by experienced directors – but also films that marked the debuts of other directors, including the fourth and youngest generation of film-makers to work under nationalized film industry. Of particular note among these films was *Dull Sunday* (*Nudná neděle*) by Drahomíra Vihanová (b. 1930), Ivan Renč's (b. 1937) *Prison Guard* (*Hlídač*), and Václav Matějka's (b. 1937) *Nakedness* (*Nahota*). Karel Vachek (b. 1931), one of the most incisive new talents of the late sixties, director of a shattering documentary about the degeneration of folklore entitled Moravian Hellas (*Moravská Hellas*) and the feature-length documentary about the "Czechoslovak Spring," *Elective Affinities* (*Spříznění volbou* – 1968), was unable to complete his first fiction film.

At the beginning of the seventies, Czechoslovak fiction-film production dropped to half that of the immediately preceding period. Except for the aforementioned films, these were for the most part mediocre and submediocre films, made by second- and third-rate directors. Otakar Vávra, however, reappeared at this time, attempting, at the end of his long career to revive the "publicistic" and "artistic documentary" genres of the Stalin years in *The Days of Treason* (*Dny zrady* – 1972), about the Munich crisis in 1938, and *Sokolovo* (1975), devoted to the deeds of the Czechoslovak army unit on the Soviet front in World War Two. And Zbyněk Brynych soon became the showcase director of this period, bringing into the screen conformist scripts in every conceivable genres, e.g. the love story *What Is the Color of Love?* (*Jakou barvu má láska* – 1973) or the film on prison life *The Night of Orange Bonfires* (*Noc oranžových nožů* – 1975).

In Slovakia in 1973, Juraj Jakubisko was permitted to shoot *Construction Century* (*Stavba storočia*), a documentary about the building of a gas pipeline across Czechoslovakia for delivering natural gas from the Soviet Union to West Germany. Štefan Uher filmed an amusing view of the war as seen through the eyes of children in *If I Had a Gun* (*Keby som mal pušku* – 1971), and shortly thereafter made a film version of the balladic folk *The Maple and Juliana* (*Javor a Juliana* – 1973). Elo Havetta, in his second and last film, *Lilies of the Field* (*Lalie polné* – 1973), confirmed the promise of his debut. Nonetheless, the overall tendency in Slovakia was also to revert to the conservative approach of the period prior to 1962.

And so, a prophecy was fulfilled, the one made by Soviet critic V. Bolshakov in the spring of 1968 in *Komsomolskaya Pravda:* "I believe," he wrote, "that the period of the development of Czechoslovak film, as represented by the Formans, the Menzels, the Němecs, and their kind, will, all things notwithstanding, not last long."

In 1973, a list of banned films was issued in Prague that contained practically all the best films of the sixties. The list concluded with an enumeration of films BANNED FOREVER: *Firemen's Ball, End of a Priest, A Report on the Party and the Guests, All My Countrymen.*

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