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VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ

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Although the name of Věra Chytilová occasionally appears in articles on feminist cinema or as a footnote to examinations of Jacques Rivette, the majority of her films remain unavailable to both critics and audiences. When that situation changes, she will be seen as one of the most radically innovative filmmakers of the sixties. While the challenging form of films such as *Daisies* (1966) and *The Fruit of Paradise* (1969) provokes strong reactions wherever they are shown, it is important to consider her work in a Czechoslovak context. The reputation of these later films has deflected attention from her earlier work and position as one of the key directors of the New Wave.

Chytilová originally studied philosophy and architecture and moved into film after varied experiences as a draughtswoman, photographic retoucher, and model. She got a job as a script girl and, despite the studio's failure to recommend her, gained a place at FAMU, where she studied direction under Otakar Vávra. In an arrangement similar to that adopted for Forman's *Talent Competition*, her graduation film, *Ceiling* (1961), and a second short, *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962), were released together as *There's a Bagful of Fleas at the Ceiling* (*U stropu je pytel blech*, 1962). Its release coincided with that of Uher's *Sunshine in a Net* and placed it at the forefront of the new developments.

Like Forman and others, Chytilová was strongly influenced by the fashion of *cinéma vérité*, which was particularly evident in *A Bagful of Fleas*. Although a "staged" film, it used nonactors and improvisation to give the effect of authenticity. It focused on a situation similar to that in Forman's *Loves of a Blonde*, the cotton mills of Náchod where the number of young women outnumbered the eligible men by five to one. The heroine is severely criticized by the Works Committee after missing work to be with her boyfriend. Unflattering portraits of the factory officials led to the film's delayed release and official complaints.

However, it is the earlier graduation film, *Ceiling*, that points to the innovative character of Chytilová's later work. Its subject was conceived within the prevailing restraints of Socialist Realism. In the original script, a former medical student becomes a fashion model and acquires an affluent lover. Disgusted by her experiences, she finally boards a train and meets some simple country people. Renewed by this

encounter, she returns to the study of medicine. As Škvorecký has pointed out, this exemplified the then fashionable "return to the people for cathartic purposes."¹

As completed, the film is more subtle although maintaining elements of the original script. Chytilová did not forget her own experiences as a model, or her plans to provide a critical examination of the fashion world. The boredom of the model's life is repeatedly emphasized and seen from a feminist standpoint. Early in the film, there is a sequence in which she is shown posing for fashion photographs in, successively, an imaginary tennis match, a scene staged in front of an Air India airliner, and another in front of an automatic dredger. The sessions are linked in a stylized and elliptical manner as the backs of two male heads move from one episode to the next as though watching play in a nonexistent tennis match. The fact that these images of women for women are the creation of men is emphasized. A male narrator observes: "He photographed me only once – thank heavens." Even her subjective thoughts are spoken by a man.

Later scenes reinforce this totally negative view as they show the ritual application of make-up and the routine of acting as a living dummy for the dressmaker. Although much of this material is shot in *cinéma vérité* style, the snippets of conversation overheard from fellow models are highly selective. Their outlook on life is superficial and materialistic, and they are shown as entirely preoccupied with boyfriends, sexual liaisons, foreign clothes, and cars. Marta's awareness of this superficiality is pointed up by an unexpected encounter with former student friends, reestablishing her links with an "innocent" past. In contrast to this conventional working out of the film's story is its conclusion, an abstract sequence recalling Jeanne Moreau's walk in *La Notte* and the end of *L'Eclisse*. It consists of a montage of distinct images, which together make up a poetic statement, losing narrative content at an early stage.

It is this sequence that calls into question the obvious social criticism that Chytilová has been making. At one level there are typical images of night (a couple, a man in a car who tries to pick up Marta, a cat). On another, there is a critique of consumerism, of which she is a part since her image is used in advertisements. Although dummies in a shop window (with their explicit parallel to her), lampshades, and a neon sign in the form of a rocket are typical products of her society, they are also presented as something strange and alien. Abstract images in which Marta becomes part of the composition – ceiling, trees, or stone – suggest nothing beyond their formal properties unless it is the existence of man as an object among objects.

In fact, it is precisely a sense of alienation that the film conveys, not merely from work in a male-dominated industry but from society as a whole. Despite a "formal" rebirth (Marta walks through trees toward the horizon), the overall mood is not negated. At the end, Marta meets her peasant family and shares their home-made bread. The film then ends with inconsequential dialogue – "It's raining." "Yes,

¹ Škvorecký, *All the Bright* p. 100.

forever raining” – and concludes with the image of rain on the window and the sound of the train moving over the tracks. It is ambiguous and open-ended.

Besides her initial collaboration with Pavel Juráček on the script, Chytilová’s team on *Ceiling* included Jiří Menzel, Juraj Jakubisko, Jan Klusák (music), Jiri Šlitr (music and lyrics), and Jaromír Šofr (photography). Speaking of his experiences while working on the film, Jakubisko said:

She makes a film as if she were buying a hat: a magnificent ceremony, full of elegance and feminine cleverness. And all the while she is suffering. In a little while the hat she bought doesn’t appeal to her anymore, and right there a style of storytelling emerges.²

While Chytilová finds that *Ceiling* no longer accords with her view of the world,³ her formal interests undercut the obvious elements of moralizing propaganda. The extensive use of recorded music (Western and Czech), the formal editing of cinéma vérité material, and an interest in nonnaturalistic relations between sound and image all point toward the kind of aesthetic complexity developed in *Daisies*. Even in her first film, Chytilová broke with easy analysis, the varying levels of presentation encouraging the spectator to become actively involved in the creation of meaning.

Something Different (1963) developed logically from the documentary impulse of *A Bagful of Fleas* and the feminist aspects of *Ceiling*. It tells the parallel stories two women, one of whom is the world champion gymnast Eva Bosáková, the other an ordinary housewife. The story of Eva is shot as “documentary” while that of Věra, the housewife, is conceived as conventional fiction. Chytilová examines the limitations and sacrifices imposed on the would-be gold medalist, the rigidity of her training program, and the narrowness of her existence. Věra escapes from her domestic and marital routine through fetishistic consumption and a casual love affair. Although the logic of the film points to the inadequacies of both lifestyles, each woman undergoing a crisis that makes her aware of the limitations within which she lives, Chytilová avoids any pat conclusion. As with *Ceiling*, there is no resolution, and both women finally “choose” the role in life that they had found inadequate. Chytilová said that the film was “a drama of the eternal struggle for immortality amidst the finality of human powers.”⁴ The words are grandiose, but the statement does indicate that she was aiming for something more than a conventional women’s liberation message, to which it is often reduced.

The main formal device is one of simple alternation, each scene with Eva being followed by one with Věra. While there is no narrative link between the “factual” and

“fictional” elements of the film, there is a comparative and structural one. The main point of the juxtaposition is to provoke thought, but it is also used for purely formal ends. There is, for instance, no need for the brief cuts to Eva during Věra’s love affair. The shots of Eva are included for the sake of poetics, the rapidity of the cutting creating a heady feeling of excitement appropriate to Věra’s situation.

Despite the clever intertwining of the two stories, the two parts of the film do not cohere to form a single impact. While this may be intentional, it is unlikely that Chytilová intended the story of Věra to be less convincing than that of Eva. The housewife’s story appears mundane and artificial alongside the treatment of Eva and fails to attain the same kind of audience identification. This may be attributable to the fact that it was Chytilová’s only attempt at conventional narrative prior to *The Apple Game* (1976).

Chytilová’s intention is to make us sympathize with the boredom of the housewife’s daily routine. She looks after her son all day and is frustrated when her husband retreats behind a newspaper in the evening. When she tries to talk about her problems, he will interrupt with comments on football or Pachmann’s latest chess win. In an early scene, she is shown repeatedly entering the kitchen in an identical shot intercut with different domestic chores. The section is cut rhythmically to scat singing by Eva Olmerová, whose voice is used systematically throughout the film. In the next section featuring Věra, she walks into the kitchen and, facing the camera front on, asks: “What was it I wanted?” Both the statement and the framing take the question out of its purely domestic context and address it to the audience.

Although the very mundanity of Věra’s situation constitutes a key part of the analysis, she is not, in conventional terms, badly treated. She is not overworked, and despite constant references to money, she and her husband seem to live quite comfortably. After playing hard to get with her lover, she drops him without any consideration for his feelings. Significantly, this coincides with the acquisition of a new toy, the family car, for which they have been saving. At the end of the film, her husband’s infidelity confirms the crisis in her situation – but the problems are not solely those of male domination.

The story of Eva Bosáková is treated with subtlety and aesthetic force. Working for the first and only time with Jan Čuřík as her cinematographer, Chytilová achieves some excellent abstract filming of both Eva’s training sessions and her final world championship performance. Effective use is made of the geometric patterns of the gymnasium floor and the basketball backboard, all serving to emphasize the isolation of the figure of Eva during practice. Bar exercises are frequently photographed from immediately overhead, giving a unique aesthetic dimension.

Apart from the high concentration on visual form in these scenes, the remainder of Eva’s story is filmed in the cinéma vérité style of parts of *Ceiling* where it is never clear how much has been “observed” and how much “organized” by the filmmakers. The painful exercises, the verbal insults, and the way in which she is forced to

² Juraj Jakubisko, interviewed in Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, pp. 357-358.

³ Věra Chytilová, interviewed by Serge Daney and Bernard Gidel, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 193 (September 1967), p. 61.

⁴ Chytilová, quoted in Škvorecký, *All the Bright*, p. 103.

continue despite herself all have the ring of truth. The presence of the camera appears accidental. On the other hand, the scene in which Eva and her husband-trainer “accidentally” discover her future theme music, “Begin the Beguine” was clearly constructed for the camera.

Chytilová is conscious of Eva’s position as a public figure and the role of the media in the creation of her image. After the film’s opening credits, the camera moves back to reveal that we are watching Eva’s performance on Věra’s television set – the one direct link between the two stories. Later on, in a head-on interview with Eva, we are made conscious of the tape recorder and the camera, the means of creating the image. When it becomes clear that something has gone wrong, that she cannot continue as required and give the young advice on how to become an honored artist, the recorder is switched off. She reveals that she had been searching for “something different.”

The climax to the film is provided by Eva’s winning the world championships. In true *cinéma vérité* fashion, this conclusion to the film was purely fortuitous. Chytilová was just filming the story of Eva, and her success or failure in the championships was a genuinely unknown factor in the film’s development.

It is presented with all the glory of a triumphant occasion. The sequence begins with close-ups of cameras and the sound of applause, a reminder of the media and of public display. At first, the image cannot be deciphered, and the cameras are gradually brought into focus. The sound of clapping could well be the flutter of birds. As she was to do later with *Daisies*, Chytilová combines both distancing and aesthetic appeal.

The exercises themselves are constructed from a combination of the competitions and flashbacks to Eva’s training program. The highly formal overhead shot is taken from the training program, but the whole is cut together so effectively that detection is almost impossible. There is one extraordinary section in which Eva’s hand appears top right and her foot bottom right of the wide-screen composition. The camera moves along the bar from the left and appears to be directly responsible for nudging her into a leftward cartwheel. This is followed by a zip pan to the photographers, two frozen swan dives (one past, one present) seen from the side, and a repeat of the same action seen in movement from the front.

Eva’s success is juxtaposed with Věra’s failure (her husband’s infidelity). The triumph is further balanced by an overhead shot of people in the streets seen as walking regulation dots. There is also a scene in which a fat cleaning woman takes Eva’s place on the bar in a deserted stadium accompanied on the soundtrack by the competition music of “Begin the Beguine.” Free at last to do what she wants, Eva chooses to train young gymnasts. Faced with the failure of her marriage, Věra opts to maintain family life.

While *Something Different* challenges conventional forms of realism and remains a key work in the development of women’s cinema, it is, like *Ceiling*, an aesthetic

experiment. Chytilová now regards the conception as correct but the execution as clumsy. For Jacques Rivette, it is a film that becomes progressively “more mysterious and questioning.”⁵ This would link the film much more closely to *Daisies*. However, *Something Different* does not really mark a notable advance on *Ceiling* save in length and technical ambition.

Despite the radical nature of Chytilová’s work and her concern to tell the truth at all costs, there was little preparation for the originality and aesthetic complexity of *Daisies*. As Claire Clouzot has pointed out: “There is no involvement, no conventional chronology no psychological development ... no narration.”⁶ The film records a succession of scenes or happenings that are linked primarily to the subject of food. Two seventeen-year-old girls, played by a salesgirl and a student, decide that the world is meaningless. As a result, they play a game of “it matters? it doesn’t matter” (“Vadí? Nevadí?”). The game, according to Chytilová “if played systematically and for prestige, may lead to death.”



Daisies, Věra Chytilová, 1966

⁵ Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye, “Entretien avec Věra Chytilová,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 198 (February 1968), p. 53.

⁶ Claire Clouzot, “Daisies,” *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1968), p. 35.

The girls live in a vacuum, without past or future, and their cheating and provocation lead to the apparent destruction of both themselves and everything about them. Throughout the film, the urge to consume is constantly linked with its obverse of destruction. The film's climax is reached when they sample, eat, and destroy a huge banquet, trampling on the food in their stiletto heels and swinging from the chandelier. The girls' attitudes are linked to the world of political destruction, the falling of the chandelier to a nuclear explosion. The film ends with a dedication to all those who become embittered at the sight of a smashed-up salad-alone!

Chytilová argued that the film's social criticism would have a greater effect – if the comic side of the happenings was accentuated. The intention was to “divert the spectator's attention from the psychology of the characters,” to “restrict his feeling of involvement and lead him to an understanding of the underlying idea or philosophy. From a certain point of view, our film is a philosophical documentary in the form of a farce.”⁷

While *Daisies* is full of references lost to a non-Czech audience, there is every reason to share Škvorecký's doubt that the meaning of the film can be restricted to a parable on the destructive force of nihilism and aimless provocation. He describes it as “an excellent, rich, boldly, and mischievously made film.”⁸ Again, the moralistic idea from which it develops is but the starting point for a highly allusive and diverse superstructure.

Much more so than *Something Different*, to which cinematographer Jan Čuřík made a major contribution, *Daisies* resulted from the interplay of several talents. In addition to Chytilová, there were also Ester Krumbachová, who collaborated on script and design, and Jaroslav Kučera, Chytilová's husband, who yet again found himself contributing to a key work. Chytilová said in an interview with Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye:

We decided to let ourselves be bound by nothing. Absolutely nothing. We would free ourselves of all the implications of the story and keep only the dialogues, very precise and very evocative, which would remain absolutely fixed. These dialogues assured us of a base, they guaranteed that we would not abandon the meaning of the film, they were in a sense the guardians of that meaning.⁹

Kučera, however, speaking of his use of color, has pointed out that things do not always turn out as expected:

⁷ Chytilová, quoted in Langdon Dewey, *Věra Chytilová's "Daisies"* (London: British Federation of Film Societies, 1968), p. 3.

⁸ Škvorecký, *All the Bright*, p. 108.

⁹ Chytilová, interviewed by Rivette and Delahaye, *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1968), p. 72.

I wanted to use color concepts to disparage a lot of things. I had no intention whatever of arousing an aesthetic impression of beauty. But somewhere, early in the game, it turned out that the structure of things with respect to each other created aesthetics whose results I didn't expect at all.¹⁰

The basic device of the film, two heroines (one brunette and one blonde) has obvious precedents. One is the Brecht/Weill *Seven Deadly Sins*, which exposed the hypocrisies of a materialist society through two girls, Anna I and Anna II, who may be sisters or aspects of the same personality. The previous year had also seen the release of Louis Malle's *Viva Maria!* in which a theatrical double act (Bardot and Moreau) fomented South American revolution and invented the striptease. Chytilová's own words suggest a definite Brechtian influence while the Malle duo may have inspired the names Marie I and Marie II. However, if Malle is an influence, *Daisies* is nearer to the anarchistic Surrealism of his adaptation of Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le Métro*.

Chytilová argues that the spectator should be free to interpret the film in his own way as an active collaborator in the creation of its meaning. She would therefore allow Rivette's suggestion that the two girls are aspects of the same personality.¹¹ However, this particular interpretation gives no important insight into the film. Since one girl is merely the mirror of the other and the various acts committed by each are interchangeable, there is no significant differentiation. As there is no psychology, the differences between the two can only be secondary (i.e., physical). The film falls into five major sections, the first of which also serves as a prologue. All of them are preceded by short scenes showing the girls at a swimming pool. There are major scenes set in the girls' apartment, and the central three sections also involve permutations on the locations of public lavatory, restaurant, and railway station. Sequences outside of this repetitive structure, but framed by it, show the two girls variously in a garden (paradise), a cabaret (acting), with a lover (romance), in the country (the search for meaning), and generating the final orgy that leads to punishment and rehabilitation. This precise structure indicates that Chytilová has not merely destroyed narrative but introduced a musical or poetic format in its place. Langdon Dewey's argument that it follows the rondo form cannot be sustained,¹² although a similar kind of discipline is used (disregarding the freedoms exercised within the structure).

The opening sections of the film present a precise statement of its theme. Behind the film's credits, we see rapidly juxtaposed images of war and explosions seen from the air, presented in grainy photography and overlaid with the harsh effects of color dyes. These are intercut with close-ups of a large flywheel driving a piston. This has

¹⁰ Jaroslav Kučera, interviewed in Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 254.

¹¹ Rivette and Delahaye, *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1968), p. 72.

¹² Dewey, *Věra Chytilová's "Daisies,"* p. 5.

no obvious connotation other than the impression created of a mindless and relentless movement. In what is no doubt a subjective association, it glistens in a way recalling the “radioactive” coating of the lovers at the beginning of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*.

The political context established, the film switches to the bathing pool where the two Mariés sit like static dolls in bikinis, placed on a boldly checked bath towel, their backs against a wooden wall, their legs thrust stiff, straight, and apart toward the camera. Marie II lifts her arm to her nose, and Marie I lifts a trumpet to her lips and blows. Their marionette-style limb and hand movements are accompanied by stylized creaks and the blowing of the trumpet by the intercutting of a falling building (the walls of Jericho?). Putting a garland of daisies on her head, Marie II states:

Marie II: *I can't do anything well. A doll – I'm a doll. You understand?*

Marie I: *Nobody understands anything.*

Marie II: *Nobody understands us.*

Marie I: *Everything's spoiled in this world.*

Marie II: *You know, if everything's spoiled.*

Marie I: *Well.*

Marie II: *We'll be spoiled too.*

The last exchange is conducted to mounting excitement as each rises up on her knees to face the other. Marie I slaps Marie II, and she falls into a lush green meadow full of daisies.

In the center of the meadow is a globular-headed tree bearing red apples. The two girls dance in front of the tree, jumping up and down in frothy short dresses and changing places to medieval-style music. Marie II picks a peach. Marie I looks at the apples on the tree. “What are you sucking?” she asks. The two Mariés have picked the forbidden fruit and their fall is preordained. However, they have picked a peach. Their downfall will not produce knowledge but a mushy exercise in self-gratification.

While this prologue remains coherent, the rest of *Daisies* presents major problems for any critical analysis. The constant fragmentation and alternation of the work together with the visual intricacy of Kučera's camera work make it extremely difficult to write about. Frequently, it can require a frame by frame analysis to determine precisely what is being projected onto the screen. The film also highlights the way in which repeated viewings produce a differing interaction between the film and the observer. Chytilová has spoken of her desire to say a great deal in a short time and of the inherent dangers of the spectator's missing the point.¹³ Kučera has indicated the

¹³ Chytilová, interviewed by Rivette and Delahaye, *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1968), p. 50.

way in which his color experiments produced effects other than those intended. He is also interested in pictorial rather than literary art, a fact that was already apparent in his work on *Desire*:

I am terribly interested in exploring the possibility of making a cinematographic image into an autonomous affair, completely separate from the conventional concept of film. It is a matter of whether we are simply creating in film more or less beautiful pictures of something, or whether these pictures might not be bearers of meaning in and by themselves, whether they might not communicate something subjectively rather than objectively. I should like to conduct an experiment in film on the level achieved years ago by modern painting, poetry, music, to create a new system of film communications media.¹⁴

The following analysis of *Daisies* is inevitably selective but is based on a complete verbal reconstruction. It is therefore related to what appears on the screen and not to the impressionist reaction that has been a standard tendency in most critical responses. The film is approached from the point of view of its three major alternating divisions: (1) the scenes in the girls' room, (2) the exploitation of men (specifically, the restaurant scenes), and (3) the outside set pieces (the cabaret, the countryside, the orgy).

The first episode in the girls' room is linked to the scene in the meadow as Marie II is forced to disgorge a peach pit. Marie I, dressed in a crimson slip, throws it out of the window, and there is a brief monochrome shot of the street and of a man disappearing round the corner. There is a manhole cover and a blast of brass band music. “What's there?” asks Marie II. In this scene, the walls of the apartment are decorated with botanical drawings and plant specimens. Marie II cuts up her quilt aimlessly in a foretaste of her destructive expertise in later scenes. Marie I again looks into the street, and Marie II hits her across the backside with a stick. “Where to?” she asks. “Somewhere lovely,” replies Marie I.

The prime objective of the scene is to communicate the mood of aimless boredom in which the girls find themselves, ready to be diverted by the slightest event. The monochrome visual and aural blast from the street evokes a strange emptiness that is peculiarly effective.

The remaining room scenes center on particular themes: death, consumption, collection (of men), meaning, and destruction. They are crucial to the film since it is here that the girls talk to each other, the discussions reflecting on their successes, failures, and future “games.” They are all filmed in color, the formal variations on a theme in each case producing a self-contained unit in which both décor and music are structured into the requirements of the happening.

¹⁴ Kučera, interviewed in Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 252.

The scene centered on death follows their success with the first male victim, from whom they con a meal in exchange for undelivered sexual favors, and their disruption of the cabaret act in a night club. Marie II is stretched out as though dead on artificial grass, with big evergreen leaves on the wall and green apples surrounding her. The white garland of daisies is at her head like a wreath. As Marie I enters the room, there is a fragment of music reminiscent of Bartók or Stravinsky and a close-up of the gas meter running out. Marie II has also left the window open – her suicide “attempt” has failed. “Who’ll pay?” (the gas bill), asks Marie I. When the telephone rings, Marie II answers: “Rehabilitation center. Die. Die. Die.” This is accompanied by a “flash through” of cut-out roses moving rapidly from the top to the bottom of the screen, coinciding with the telephone clicks at each reference to the word “die.” As they squabble over a stocking, there is a cryptic dialogue exchange on the passing of life and the “virtues” of being at home. The scene ends with Marie I’s head outlined against a huge evergreen leaf – an image recalling a fashion photograph. She sets a pendulum swinging, and the theme of time and death is suitably concluded with a “flash through” of yellow lilies.

The scene concerned with consumption takes the form of a midnight “orgy” during which the girls cut up long bread rolls, an olive, sausages, Marie I’s toe (symbolically), and bananas. These phallic representations are sliced with relish as a disembodied male voice pleads with “Julie” (Marie I) over the telephone. When there’s no real food left to eat, they content themselves with advertisements from magazines. Throughout, the stylized dialogue over the telephone is designed as a counterpoint to their actions. The scene is highly feminist and, unlike the previous two, joins in the spirit of the happening. It is only with the eating of a paper steak that critical attention is again focused on the girls.

The “collection” scene takes place against a background of twisted wire spirals and typographic decoration, with names featured on both walls and ceiling. The music takes the form of a kind of concerto for typewriter as they work through an alphabet of past lovers. The door bell rings and the same male voice pleads the door.

A shot of the moon accompanied by the ominous music that had been linked to the flywheel of the film’s opening is the first image of the section concerned with “meaning.” Marie II utters the word “butterfly” in a bewildered fashion. She further reflects: “Why does one say ‘I love you?’ Why not just ‘an egg?’” They take a bath, talk about death, and push a cut-out muscleman under the water. The walls are covered in collages, the bath in black and white check. Are we really here, they reflect, and suppose they are not really themselves. “Do you really exist?” Marie I asks Marie II. Since she is not registered at the address and doesn’t work anywhere, there’s no proof. As they sit with the bath water up to their necks, both Marias lap at the water in front of them.

The final room scene, which follows their abortive search for meaning in the country, repeats a selection of dialogue from the previous scenes:

“It’s great to be home.”

“Die. Die. Die”

“I’m hungry. You’re hungry. We’re hungry.”

“Don’t be mean to me now. You know I love you.”

“We have no proof of anything.”

“Feel how time flies.”

They roll each other up in colored sheets, including squares from previous scenes and the artificial grass. They agree: “No more walks – never.” Then, following a collage “flash through” of faces, they cut each other up as the images are broken and fragmented like an overlaid jigsaw puzzle. Their frenzied action is accompanied by music and the rhythmic snipping of scissors. The conclusion to their quest is and will be self-destruction. The cutting up of the image also provides a correlative to the film’s editing style, itself a fragmented montage.

In contrast to the room scenes, those set in restaurants are entirely straightforward and of interest primarily for the formal variations on a simple situation. In the first, Marie I is alone with her pickup when Marie II arrives, introducing herself as sister Jarmila. Her inconvenient arrival and ruthless handling of the situation leaves the man speechless. Rudely, she demands almost everything on the menu, asking if he has children or is on a diet. As they dive into cream cakes, the cream squirts on his face. Throughout, Marie I maintains a pose of little girl mischievousness, pretending to eat demurely with a spoon.

The scene presents the film’s first set of coordinated “effects,” with filters used to produce images in shades of lemon, orange, yellow, green, and monochrome. This is linked to light ballet-style music, with freeze frames and frames omitted to supply the fragmented rhythm. Apart from being great fun and beautiful to look at, the technique gives the impression of a meal of interminable length in a brief and succinct form.

At the station, the luckless male is despatched with an armful of magazines he didn’t want. The train journey provides an opportunity for fast-moving images of rails and trains, filmed with prismatic color effects on monochrome. The rapid journey ends in a dark tunnel, after which the two Marias enter a night club through a tunnel-like entrance. It provides a direct link with the succeeding cabaret sequence.

The second meal is much less elaborate, short, and almost realistic in its presentation. We learn that the man is their fifth victim and that the “game” is beginning to pall. The final meal is a variation on the first. It is shot in monochrome, color and sepia, beginning with overhead shots of plates, the food rapidly disappearing as similar editing techniques are used. Their pickup this time is a little old man with a

beard who has trouble with his fish bones to the counterpoint of “Plaisir d’Amour” and Boccherini. When he is taken to the station, the action is speeded *Zazie*-style to the accompaniment of music that could almost be Parisian. He first gets on and then off the train until the two girls finally catch it by accident, and he is left behind on the platform. The train moves through a tunnel, and there is a brief repeat of the “prism” effects until the two girls emerge on foot, stumbling over the rails with sooty faces. One has acquired a white spotted dress (on black) and the other a black spotted dress (on white). They hoot and chuff. “We can’t keep thinking up new things all the time. We’ll have to think of a worse life.”

These three scenes in which the girls exploit the weaknesses of older men are supplemented by one other – the seduction scene featuring the man with the butterfly collection (Jan Klusák) and Marie II. It is odd in that it takes place outside of the film’s repetitive structure and is the only scene to feature one of the Maries without her “twin.” Presumably, this is accounted for by the fact that it is not normal to seduce two girls at once. It is closely linked to the phallic eating orgy that follows and is dominated by butterfly motifs – a specifically Czech reference to sex.

The scene begins with romantic images – a yellow butterfly on a rose, Klusák’s hands round a glass of red wine – before moving to Marie II. She replaces her shoulder strap. To a red filter change, Klusák plays concerto-style in what begins as a take-off of the romantic piano seduction scene. As myriads of different butterflies, fragments of wings, and close-ups of markings “flash through,” a beautiful collage is created (the music somewhere between light classical and honky-tonk). Marie II strips, intercut with the butterflies, holding exhibition cases over strategic areas. As Klusák approaches the climax of his exercise, the effect is deflated when she asks: “Isn’t there any food round here – at least, some jam.” Throughout the scene, there is a continually ironic look at his stylized smooth talk. It is his voice that continues over the telephone during their eating orgy and is heard at the door during the “typographical” scene.

The observation of men in all these scenes is unquestionably feminist and highly critical. They are shown as vain, preoccupied with sex, and assuming an automatic right to cheat on their wives with young women. What is worse, these basic characteristics are cloaked with a maudlin sentimentality. It is often observed that Chytilová was pregnant when she made the film, but it is clear both from her films and, for instance, her letter to President Husák¹⁵ that her feminist stance is no passing phase.

The three major set pieces that take place outside of the film’s repetitive structure are the cabaret (acting), the scenes in the country (search for meaning), and the final orgy (total destruction). In the first and the last of these, the filmmakers take the opportunity for a mischievous identification with the two heroines.

¹⁵ Věra Chytilová, “I Want to Work,” *Index on Censorship* 5(2) (Summer 1976): 17-20.

At the night club, the two girls enter through a red curtain as though they are about to give a performance. They are soon pushed aside by a couple who begin to dance the Charleston, the man wearing a black hat, bearded, and with a white carnation in his button hole. They dance throughout to a wordless jazz number by Eva Pilarová, Czechoslovakia’s leading popular singer. However, whereas their performance is condemned to heavy brown sepia, the efforts of the rival show the two Maries – have all the advantages of Kučera’s color experimentation. They enter a box that is plush red and resembles the stage of a Punch-and-Judy show. They slide down their seats to the base as the waiter appears. Rhythmically, bottles and glasses appear before them on the table (they’ve brought their own beer). The scene alternates between them and the Charleston, taking them through a series of color-filter effects. Their drinks overflow in iridescent bubbles as they get drunk, and an arm waving a straw becomes an elongated, waving after-shadow. As Marie I goes cross-eyed in red, the screen changes color to yellow, and then green in accord with her eye movements. Marie II blows prismatic bubbles to the crowd’s applause. The applause turns to whistling as the signaling of the waiters becomes more frantic, and the two girls are ejected.



Daises, Věra Chytilová, 1966

Apart from being a teenage disruption of establishment pleasures, the cabaret sequence almost certainly has a private and subversive meaning. Škvorecký has given an account of the attempt by Novotný’s cultural department to discredit jazz and pop singers.¹⁶ Eva Olmerová, the leading jazz singer, was alleged to have fallen off stage

¹⁶ Škvorecký, *All the Brights*, p. 103-104.

into the audience of the Alhambra night club while drunk. This is the obvious reference for the scene, but Eva Pilarová, who sings throughout, and other singers were accused of worse infamies. Pilarová and Waldemar Matuška were accused of urinating on a workers' delegation while Karel Gott sang "The Bubbling Stream" in accompaniment. In this sense, the scene is both an attack on the cultural establishment and the neo-Stalinist tactics used to discredit popular culture. This interpretation is supported by the applause and whistling on the soundtrack, which is certainly from an ice hockey match and connotes the annual confrontation between Czechoslovakia and the USSR (a confrontation that, of course, became overtly political in 1969).

Following the room scene devoted to "philosophy," the scene shifts (monochrome) to an advertising billboard. "Nothing exists," says one of the girls. The other looks through a hole in the billboard at a field of bright green grass. "Is there something there?" The episode leads almost directly to the sequence in the country, which, like *Ceiling*, has echoes of returning to people, to coots, to the verities obscured by city life. The two girls roll in a field of grass. To the sound of a harpsichord, there is a "flash through" of iron filings and various images of industrial waste. Marie I appears in a hat made of wire debris and Marie II in a similarly constructed stole – both a private testimony to Krumbachová's ingenuity as a costume designer. Following the reappearance of the ominous music from the film's opening in the previous scene, the flywheel also makes its appearance within the film's reality.

They see a gardener and his dog in the distance. It is a curious, elegiac episode accompanied by choral music. He carries a hose and walks as though dragging a heavy weight. They call to him. He turns round but appears not to see them – for him, they do not exist. In another scene, workers ride past and between them on bicycles to a Léhar-style waltz. Again they are ignored. "No one really notices us." "What if we were ill?"

They take to a boat for another episode based on ritual dialogue. Disturbed at y in which no one notices them, they again ask the question: "Why?" Jumping up and down at opposite ends of the boat, they chant:

Why is the water? Why?

Why is the river there? Why?

Why? am I cold? Why?

When they come to a square littered with the discarded husks from the corn they have eaten, they conclude: "We do exist, after all." Their existence is confirmed destruction and debris they have left behind. Superficially critical of their nihilism, Chytilová seems to take their side as they march down the street chanting defiantly:

"We are." They pass a whole array of different locks and padlocks rhythmically edited to martial music. The obvious connotation is that of closed opportunities.

Their final iconoclastic orgy has links with Buñuel's *Viridiana* in its attack on established order, opulence, good taste, and good manners. They open the door into a vast chamber laid out for a luxurious banquet. Symphonic music links it to the tastes of establishment culture, but the use of music from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* is also prophetic.

The girls are stunned by the unexpected vision. They gasp at the richness of the spread with much magnified whispering and lip smacking on the soundtrack. The phallic swan motif that is repeated in both the ashtrays and the food comes in for particular attention. Suddenly, Marie I accidentally knocks over a glass. She gasps with exaggerated guilt, and the sound is magnified and repeated in a staccato rhythm as still shots of colored food flash through. Her head is intercut in a nodding fashion as frames are omitted. The table setting looks like a magazine illustration. With the words "Does it really matter?" the photography changes to full color, fare sounds, and the two Maries embark on their masterpiece of destruction.

Their main project is to sample everything in sight, despoiling each dish as quickly as possible with their sticky fingers. Marie II sticks out her tongue, signalling the final slapstick, which is also heralded by the Austrian national anthem. They throw cream cakes at each other in time-honored fashion. Like the beggar in *Viridiana*, Marie II drapes a curtain about herself for a "fashion show" and dances on the food. Marie I joins her, strips off her dress, and dances with her petticoat hanging from her bust like a short nightgown. They are seen dancing with a blue pillar in the background and glass panels to the left and right. The scene evokes both a fashion parade and a strip show. The impression is confirmed when Marie I dances on the food in her stiletto heels and kicks a whole chicken high into the air a discarded shoe. When they swing on the chandelier (a conventional element Hollywood film orgies), it is also presented as a trapeze act accompanied by an appropriate drum roll. The sound of breaking glass overlaps with the sound of the girls hitting the water. Like witches, they are subjected to a ritual ducking on the of oars.

White words are typed onto the screen, "It had to end like this." (Why? They are wicked girls and the film must have a moral ending.) The girls call out: "We're drowning down here because we're completely spoiled." After their punishment, they put things to rights (in monochrome): "If we're good and work hard, everything will be beautiful again." They are dressed in old newspapers tied up with string, a symbol of correct convictions. They pile the food in revolting heaps onto the serving plates, reassemble the broken plates on a filthy tablecloth, and arrange the napkins on top. This, we are told, is what would happen if they were given the chance to make amends.

As they lie back in self-satisfaction on the table, they ask: "Is it just a game?" "No." "We are really truthfully happy." "But it doesn't matter." The chandelier falls

on them in slow motion merging with the atomic explosion of the opening. As the war-ravaged houses reappear, the film's dedication is typed out in red – "To all those who become embittered at the sight of a smashed-up salad – alone!" The interesting thing about this conclusion is that disaster only strikes *after* the two girls have decided to be "happy" and exhibit "correct" attitudes. Conformity, if based on apathy and lack of conviction, is ultimately more destructive than any of the girls' stupid excesses. It is such an apathy when faced with the world's injustice that allows and permits the wars of the twentieth century. It is the conclusion of a moralist.

Nearly all the scenes save those set in the lavatories and at the swimming pool have been considered. These are of importance because of their place in the rhythmic structure of the film. The swimming pool is the setting for the girl's decision to play the game of "Vadí? Nevadí?" attractive effects. One scene emphasizes the relativity of perception through the use of orange and blue flashes while another presents the girls in a purple and yellow process reminiscent of a Warhol print.

While it is not possible to obtain a precise account of developments in painting and sculpture in Czechoslovakia in the late sixties, *Daisies* undoubtedly draws from this climate of experiment. Krumbachová's background was, of course, that of the art school, and descriptions of her apartment suggest that it resembles the sets for her own films. Chytilová also showed similar interests in her episode *Pearls of the Deep* (the scene in which she follows the process printmaking). The emphasis on collage/montage strongly recalls the work of Medek, and the influence of "happenings" is also apparent even if the final effect is subjected to rigorous control at the editing stage.

Chytilová has made her points about the film's being a philosophical documentary, of diverting the spectator from involvement, destroying psychology, and accentuating the humor. There is no question that all this is done. Traditional narrative is rejected in favor of a constant rhythmic fragmentation, in which the characters' comments on what they will do next are half-addressed to the audience. At no time is there any attempt to the photography, which constantly juggles with perception and "reality."

Daisies is not a political propaganda *Has Seven Heads* (*Der Leone Have Sept Cabeças*, 1970), nor does it approach the problems of society in the same terms as a Godard. While it both observes and questions life in contemporary Czechoslovakia, it also turns itself into a beautiful object. Western Marxists with similar objectives tend to exclude anything that might conceivably be considered "beautiful" (as mystifying), and there is a marked absence of the wit that characterizes Chytilová's film. In the West, of course, the virtues of aesthetic appeal and the assertion of the right to be "avant garde" do not have the same significance or require the same championship.

It is clear that Chytilová, Krumbachová, and Kučera did not know precisely what would emerge from their collective work. As Chytilová has said, she is the first to be surprised. At a superficial level of interpretation – the problems of apathetic and "nonpositive" youth – there was nothing that broke significant new was an aesthetic

form linked to a feminist statement that was certainly original – and not only in Eastern Europe.

The uncompromising critique of male attitudes to sex has already been mentioned. However, that is not sufficient to explain why, for instance, contemporary Western screenings of the film are often accompanied by exclusively feminine laughter. Equally, male viewers frequently feel an antipathy toward the film's "heroines." This division no doubt relates partly to the fact that the film is on target and partly to a sense of humor that is sometimes only "seen" by one-half of the audience. Also the girls fail to conform to the stereotypes expected by a male audience. As Hilda Scott has pointed out, socialism in Czechoslovakia tended to institutionalize existing inequalities between the sexes,¹⁷ and *Daisies* certainly constitutes an attack on some identifiable targets.

The move toward independent creation, away from illustrating a script toward improvisation and pictorial experimentation inevitably led *Daisies* to a system of variations on its theme. The "cut-up" structure, which relies heavily on montage, derives directly from a critical approach to the theme of consumption as destruction. However, the prevailing tone becomes one of fresh and entertaining irreverence in which the color and structure, to adopt Kučera, create an aesthetic meaning of their own. The film underlines the fact that cinema is the product of a series of interactions, which, to a greater or lesser extent, correspond to conscious or overt intentions. The rigid, stylized dialogue does not necessarily safeguard the meaning unless the spectator chooses this possibility. The preceding account of the film, with its inevitable emphasis on words and actions rather than on images, can be regarded only partially accurate. It emphasizes a level of meaning that does not enjoy a similar prominence during the experience of watching it.

In view of the film's ambiguities, it is not surprising that Chytilová's own attitude toward it should occasionally appear inconsistent. For instance, she claims that if the meaning is sometimes "invisible" and certain scenes not understood, this reflects badly on the film. On the other hand, she demands freedom for herself as creator and freedom for the audience as spectators, intending that the interplay between the two should be active. In that collaboration, the spectator must be constantly on the alert, the rapidity of the film and its disjunctions constantly threatening or "reversing" his first interpretations. The point of the film is to make a single interpretation impossible, to force a conclusion that what has been seen constitutes only part of "the truth." The film's conception is a provocation in the context of conventional audience expectations, and the film usually has precisely that effect both in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere.

¹⁷ Hilda Scott, *Women and Socialism: Experiences from Eastern Europe* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).

Chytilová has always been attracted by new methods and new themes, attempting to make a fresh start with each of her films. With *The Fruit of Paradise*, she remained true to her views and produced a film to which it is even more difficult to ascribe any one meaning or group of meanings. It is much influenced by the commedia dell'arte both in the stylized presentation of its characters and the scope allowed for improvisation. Chytilová deliberately selected members of a provincial theater company to play the leading roles.

The theme or story, never Chytilová's prime concern, is rendered with all the ambiguity that might be expected. A stylized introduction symbolizes the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. Eva (Eve) is married to Josef (Adam), and they are shown early in the film under a tree, from which an apple falls. Lurking in the garden is Robert (the devil/the serpent), who is waiting to tempt them. It turns out that Robert is an assassin who has killed six women. Robert pursues Eva, his intended victim, but the story has an unusual twist – it is she who kills him.

That is the original story conceived by Krumbachová, but, as in the case of *Daisies*, it serves only as a springboard for what follows. Unlike the earlier film, *The Fruit of Paradise* does not have the same passionate attack and finds its justification in a search for formal and visual beauty in its own right. While it is a beauty that derives from ambiguity, it arises from a process of improvisation rather than the controlled intellectual aesthetics of a Robbe-Grillet.

In contradiction, the opening prologue is highly structured and could almost constitute a separate work. During the credits, which consist of paintings of trees and fruit, the soundtrack assembles a number of sounds in a “musique concrète” manner, including bells and the unearthly cry of the peacock. Accompanied by choral music, the naked bodies of Adam and Eve are presented in slow motion. They become a screen for microscopic close-ups of leaves, the human flesh covered by the veins and textures of natural vegetation. The initial images are dominated by blue and orange color effects. Later, there is a rhythmic repetition of selected images – leaves, daisies, a rose, white flowers – which are at first combined with the Adam and Eve images and finally shown on their own.

The central section of the prologue shows the couple posed in various stylized positions in the woods to the accompaniment of the choral chanting of God's words. If they pick golden apples from a tree, the result will be death. The words of the serpent contradict this. The episode is notable for some curious camera movements focused in one instance on the bole of a tree and in another on white blossoms. The camera jerks up and down, left and right, appearing to lurch out of control but maintaining an absolutely firm rhythm.

As the section concludes, the camera moves to a front-on image of a beautiful girl folding her hands over her breasts. She is surrounded by autumn leaves, the images of which cover her body, fragmenting it and enmeshing it with the landscape. The final episode shows the naked couple kissing in a stream. The woman leans back in a

posture of surrender as the chorus chants: “Tell me the truth.” The leaves, roses and white flowers appear again, ending, as before, with a gray rock and a metallic sound punctuation.

This extraordinarily beautiful prologue shows Adam and Eve as literally part of a natural paradise broken only by the words of the serpent, the demand for truth, and the hardness of rock. The opening scene of the story proper shows Eva (Jitka Nováková) and Josef (Karel Novák) under an emerald green tree against a lush pastoral background. The setting provides an obvious link with the prologue (and *Daisies*), but the scene has now shifted to an area of “recognizable” reality. Eva lies back across Josef's lap, eats an apple, and sleeps. Before this, the red-garbed Robert has been seen disappearing against a background of red flowers and berries. A worm is found crawling in Eva's hand, and Josef refers to Robert as “the one that everyone is waiting for.”

The film defies any realistic interpretation and, to some extent, interpretation of any kind. However, in the spirit of Chytilová's “active interaction,” the attempt is worthwhile. While the setting is deliberately unclear, the characters in the film appear to be staying at a country hotel set at a lakeside spa where people come to enjoy the mud cure. This provides a rational explanation for the couple, who are naked but buried up to their shoulders in mud, and the various scenes related to the house, the restaurant, the picnic, and the beach. Robert, we are told, always spends here, and as a bachelor, he can do anything he likes.

The film is based on a series of encounters between Eva and Robert. While she may be his intended victim, it is her infatuation with him that could lead to her downfall. In an early scene, the threat that he represents is indicated when he is shown stretched on an overhanging branch like a snake awaiting its prey. A sinister effect is created by the call of a peacock, shuddering images of the running bird, and the wild metallic vibration of wind-swept undergrowth.

To some extent, her fascination with Robert is encouraged by her husband's lack of interest and duplicity. She receives a scented letter (presumably from a mistress) but refuses to explain. Only later does he confess that he has lied to her. However, her interest in Robert precedes this “plot” element, and she has already become obsessed with the secrets she may discover in his red/brown attaché case (a kind of Pandora's box).

The episodes between them are filmed with an engaging absurdity and irreverence. Their first verbal exchange occurs when Eva climbs over the wall (of paradise?) to pick vegetables for her husband. Robert exchanges formally polite conversation as he urinates from the opposite side. It is then that she first discovers his briefcase discarded in a tree. In their second scene together, she is planting carrots, and they circle each other in a kind of ritual courtship. Again the briefcase makes an appearance.

During a collective game of beach ball, Robert drops the key to his room, and Josef is preoccupied with a big-breasted woman and a nymphet in a bikini. Eva has both the motive and opportunity to sneak off in her quest for knowledge. In Robert's room, she opens the drawers of the desk. They contain cherries, assorted buttons and keys, a whole apple, horse chestnut shells, and autumn leaves. The final drawer proves to be a false façade. As footsteps approach and Robert tries the locked door, Eva retreats behind the curtains. There, she finds the briefcase hidden between the window and the Venetian blind. Inside, she discovers lace and a pile of rubber stamps. She stamps herself with the number six, only later discovering that this is the mark the murderer leaves on his victims.

The particular significance of the scene is again not obvious. The placing of the attaché case provides a connotation of voyeurism and hidden vices. The lace and stamps probably relate to women victims and, like *Daisies*, the idea of collection. In opening the briefcase, Eva has presumably selected herself as the next victim since, to echo the film's prologue, knowledge equals death. The stamps are also likely to be an in-joke reference to the buttock-stamping scenes in *Closely Watched Trains*. The desk drawers obviously refer to memory and the past, a function deriving logically from what might be there in reality. However, the contents seem to be little more than a characteristic mélange of Krumbachová's decorative invention.

In the final scene between Eva and Robert, they strike highly stylized poses by the lakeside. Robert will kill her despite the fact that they love each other and she was the first to come to him voluntarily. His final words are: "Everything is nothing but a dream. You are a lie." A shot rings out, and he falls at her feet. She feels in his overcoat pocket, which she is wearing against the cold, and takes out a pistol and a rose. Apart from suggesting the death of a loved one, this juxtaposition could also be interpreted to mean that the intensity and delusions of romantic love can be resolved only in death.

As presented, Robert has been killed by a pistol shot, yet it is clear that Eva has not the fired gun. On the other hand, the gun is in her pocket. The implication is, to quote Robert, that everything is "nothing but a dream" and that the truth cannot be found. Having gained this knowledge, Eva is torn between conflicting impulses. She runs from the scene of the "crime" and tries desperately and unsuccessfully to climb back over the wall where she had first spoken to Robert. The association with the garden of Eden returns together with the choral chant from the film's opening, "Tell me the truth..."

In the film's last section, Eva approaches Josef across snow (a physical barrier) is walking in front of a large country mansion (presumably the "hotel"). She calls and asks him not to turn away from her. She says: "Don't try to find out the truth, I no longer wish to know." The section ends as she proffers and twirls a red rose in front of the camera lens – an invitation to a romance that will no longer be innocent.

The film ends with a chant from Genesis:

And knew they were naked
Then they heard God
They hid from his eyes
They hid away among the trees of the garden.

The accompanying image consists of a black shot of waving grass that disappears from the screen in a simultaneous upward fade and wipe. The final credits show the paintings from the beginning, the trees stunted and lifeless.

The film's verbal message clearly lies in Josef's comment that he does not understand anything, Robert's view that everything is a dream, and Eva's wish to give up the search for truth. To search for truth whether or not personified in a romantic ideal (i.e. Robert) is to court death. It is, of course, a fulfillment of the biblical prophecy and a comment on the nature of the film, but in view of Chytilová's earlier insistence on "truth," it could also be interpreted as a personal testament.

Much more than *Daisies*, *The Fruit of Paradise* is a film that requires the audience to construct its own meaning, its own comprehension of "truth." To seek a fully coherent explanation of the relations among Eva, Robert, and Josef is to pursue an endless enterprise. However, it is surely no accident that Robert is dressed in red, the color of passion, and Josef in gray, the color of routine. Robert is both an eligible means of escape, the devil, and a murderer – a fatal combination tempted beyond the conventions of the ideal state (whether this belongs to God or socialism). Josef represents safety, hypocrisy, and compromise, and it is that Eva returns.

Chytilová's film is said to deal with homosexuality.¹⁸ It is difficult to see where unless it be in the almost conspiratorial association that develops between Josef and Robert during one section of the film. However, this could also be seen as the men versus women theme that reappears in all of Chytilová's work. There is no evidence of direct political or social comment in the film. Nonetheless, given Chytilová's concern with "truth" in her earlier work, it reveals a pessimistic outlook to posit the destruction caused by knowledge. The search for truth in the late sixties led merely to its repression.

In many respects, the film's resolutely experimental nature has the appearance of a last fling. It is genuinely experimental in that it explores unconventional and "impossible" associations, and Chytilová's strength lies in the confidence with which she approaches just such impossibilities. Even more than in *Daisies*, it is a film in which the visual qualities are dominant. Whereas the "aesthetics" of *Daisies* may have arisen

¹⁸ Richard Dyer, ed., *Gays and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1977).

partly by accident and as a result of its critical approach, *The Fruit of Paradise* is clearly a deliberate exploration and celebration of formal effects.

The most original aspect of the visual style lies in Kučera's feeling for texture within the pictorial composition. This is not a precise feeling for the "magical" qualities of individual objects found, for instance, in Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* but a concern with the total texture of the composition.

An example can be taken from the scene in which Eva is collecting vegetables for Josef and is interrupted by Robert. One image from the scene is split into three horizontal bands: (1) at the top, the leaves of trees; (2) in the center, the wall; and (3) at the bottom, the field of vegetables. Eva is crouched on the left of the frame above the vegetables while Robert stands to the right of the frame above the wall. In the center of the image and between them is the straight trunk of a tree and a bush overhanging the wall. It is the contrasts in texture within this overall composition, itself geometric, that provides the effect. The individual leaves of the overhanging bush are clearly visible as are the broad leaves in the field. The vertical lines in the tree bark are carefully delineated. Not only is the composition typical but so is the balance of textures and quality of detail. The effect is not merely that of design and organization but also of technical processing.

This use of a textured landscape is rare in cinema although it recalls certain scenes in Antonioni's work (e.g., the fields at the end of *La Notte*, the London park in *Blow Up*). There are also two purely aesthetic scenes where the characters become points of color in an abstract composition. The first is when the group of guests are playing with an orange balloon on the lakeshore. The carefully selected color points become blurred in a visual effect that recalls the paintings of Seurat. Later, after Robert's "murder," there is an extraordinarily beautiful sequence as Eva's red-clad figure runs through the green fields. The image is rhythmically blurred, jerking, seen sideways up, but is at the same time fluid and graceful. Presumably justified by the attempt to convey her anguish, it is simply a sequence of remarkable beauty.

There is no parallel with the fragmented montage of *Daisies*. The only overt use is to intercut close-ups of animals' heads at strategic points in the action. These are mostly linked to the appearance of Robert – in the first instance as a cock, in the last instance, as an eagle and an alligator. Two scenes derive from the editing techniques of *Daisies* in their use of eliminated frame methods.

These elements of the film derive primarily from the inspiration of Kučera and Chytilová but interact with the décor, costumes, and food, a continuation of the Krumbachová/Chytilová collaboration of *Daisies*. However, in its deliberate play with narrative and improvisation, *The Fruit of Paradise* is the film that brings Chytilová closest to the work of Jacques Rivette.

It is tempting to look at Chytilová's later film *The Apple Game* (1976) in the light of her earlier work. Unlike many postinvasion films, there are recognizable links with her previous features. However, it is more important to consider it in the context of

the seventies, and for this reason, it is deferred to the next chapter. In any case, this does not negate a summing up of Chytilová's contribution to the sixties.

Her importance lies in her recognition of the critical impact of formal innovation. Unlike Menzel, who injected surrealist imagery into a conventional form, or Němec, who consistently eliminated (*Diamonds of the Night*, *Martyrs of Love*) or (*The Party and the Guests*) dialogue, Chytilová opted for the disjunctive. The formal editing and intercutting of the two stories of *Something Different* encourages critical attitude to the reality presented. Likewise, the aggressive montage of *Daisies* allows her audience no opportunity for easy adjustment. Only in the case *The Fruit of Paradise* does her concern for active interaction between filmmaker and audience make demands beyond the capacities of most audiences. The films place her at the forefront of modernist developments in the cinema of the sixties.

In: Hames, Peter. *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. University of California Press., Berkeley, 1985, pp. 206-228.