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Popular Nostalgia

On Alternative Modes of Popular Cinema in Post-1989 Czech Production

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Some 25 years have passed since the 1989 power transition called the Velvet Revolution; a time-span during which Czech film production, distribution and consumption changed radically. Among the most relevant processes affecting the region were: Czechoslovakia's split in two separate nations, each with its own audiovisual markets and laws; the abrupt transformation of a subsidised state industry into a private one; the shift from state-control of film imports to a free market in which US film productions prevailed and many European products disappeared; radical shifts in the media scenario, including the emergence of private TV broadcasters, a significant drop in film attendance and the development of multiplexes. Despite all of these major changes, outside of the Czech Republic there has been very little research produced on them. Moreover, in what research has been produced, the focus is often on issues of authors and style, with related attempts to trace lineages connecting the golden era of the Czech and Slovak New Wave to the less highly regarded present time.[1] An issue that is paramount to free-market audiovisual production appears to have been overlooked: the production, circulation and consumption of popular cinema.

Rather than taking the term 'popular cinema' for granted as a self-evident notion and moving forward from there, I would like to propose some intertwined concepts as well. First, the notion of popular cinema should simultaneously encompass both its market and its anthropological values, as Dyer and Vincendeau have done when examining European popular cinema.[2] They use this two-fold approach to look at how successful a product is in terms of consumption, and in what ways it conveys traditional, pre-technological forms of (folk) culture.[3]

Second, the notion of popular cinema that I rely on is not based exclusively on the close reading of films.[4] Instead I argue that greater attention needs to be paid to circulation. John Fiske has reminded us that popular culture is not self-sufficient, because instead of creating completed structures of meaning embedded in the text, dissemination and use are crucial determinants, as popular culture refers to and provokes meanings and pleasures that are 'relevant to everyday life'. For this reason I would like to bring forward here the importance of the notion of 'everyday life',[5] as represented in popular films.

Third, I argue that the issues Toby Miller has raised when referring to popular cinema remain valid. Namely, the fact that the reflections on popular cinema might benefit greatly by including within their scope objects such as institutional policies and legal frameworks. Furthermore, the very notion of popular is transient, as it is coined under specific historical circumstances and by specific agencies, among which film criticism played and in part still holds a relevant role. Finally, opening the scope of research beyond authors and style enables a reading of individual films to connect in a rigorous and effective way to the society from which they emerge. Miller has criticised the lack of engagement within film studies on a number of fundamental points, including: '(i) A lack of relevance in the output of cinema studies to both popular cinema and the policy-driven discussion of films; (ii) a lack of engagement with the sense-making practices of criticism and research conducted outside the textualist and historical side of the humanities; (iii) a lack of engagement with social science.'[6]

Increasingly, film studies are connected to social science; nonetheless, much remains to be done in the examination of policies and sense-making practices as means of creating Bourdieu's 'distinction'. By the term 'distinction', French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to the strategies social

classes adopt to create aesthetic taste as a way to take advantage of their cultural capital and therefore aspire to social mobility, particularly when such capital is disjointed from economic capital.[7] Individual products are qualified as distinctive by agents such as film criticism, praise for particular kinds of films, and institutions that finance film productions because of their acknowledged aesthetic, cultural and somehow political value. In consequence, such films, and related film-makers, are recognised as culturally palatable, and viewing and appreciating them creates a distinction, that is, increases the viewers' cultural capital. Factors such as institutional policies and film criticism are influential in determining both highbrow *and* popular cinema production and consumption. I claim that contemporary Czech cinema offers two different kinds of popular cinema: traditional popular genres, such as farce, and production that is allegedly ethically and aesthetically engaged, the output of established auteurs.[8] In this regard, the notion of popular culture coined by scholars in early cultural studies calls for revision. In point of fact, a political and critical value is attached to the notion of popular in the work of scholars such as Raymond Williams and John Fiske, both influenced by Marxism, through their peculiar reading of Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci's writings.[9] Fiske singled out popular culture in 1989 as 'made by various formations of subordinated or disempowered people out of resources, both discursive and material, that are provided by the social system that disempowers them.'[10] Given the major shifts and changes in both social structures and media practices during the intervening decades, I suggest that the people producing popular culture be considered as encompassing a wider social scale than Fiske's 'subordinated or disempowered people'. Since social classes as conceived in traditional sociology seem not to find adequate reflection within contemporary society, and access to resources does not necessarily determine audiences' consumption of popular culture, we should think of popular cinema as a product that is alternatively top-down and bottom-up, meeting a widespread demand, reflecting deeply rooted cultural motifs and circulating across a broad media platform.

My focus here begins with film production in the mid-1990s and extends into the first half of the 2000s' first decade. This period, which was characterised by major international achievements such as an Academy Award for *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), occasioned temporary, specific modes of production,

a particular media scene and contemporary alternative notions of popular cinema. My reasons for choosing this time-span are related to major shifts in the framework defining film production and related activities in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, new laws were implemented after the collapse of the state-financed film industry in the early 1990s, as happened in an analogous way in many former socialist bloc countries.[11] Regarding Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic, I refer to laws 241/1992 and 273/1993. The first one established the terms of state support to the film industry, namely the Státní fond České republiky pro podporu a rozvoj české cinematografie (Czech Cinema Support and Development State Fund), a typically European institution fostering audiovisual production considered relevant to the national culture. The second law gave juridical consistency to the post-1989 organisation of audiovisual production and aligned the national audiovisual market to that of the Western European countries, bringing forth private TV broadcasting and home video and having some major consequences for film exhibition.[12] In 1993 the Český lev (Czech Lion)[13] award was established, a national acknowledgement founded by film producer and director Petr Vachler and based on the template of the American Academy Award.[14] On the other hand, the first decade of the twenty-first century marked a period of turmoil for the film industry, as attempts to revitalise the now-feeble state support policies failed and one of the major national producers, the Czech national broadcasting channel (Česká televize), reduced its involvement in film production.

When compared to its regional counterparts, Czech cinema after the Velvet Revolution benefited from a unique situation: despite the dramatic drop in admissions from 1989 to the mid-1990s, falling from above 50 million to fewer than 10 million per year,[15] and despite the contemporary and constant increase in admittance prices, Czech audiences always showed their appreciation for national film production by consistently and massively attending the screenings of Czech films. In the years summarised below, the highest grossing films – first on the Czechoslovak, and since 1993 on the Czech market only – were all national productions: in 1991 *Tankový prapor* (*The Tank Battalion*), in 1992 *Černí baroni* (The black barons), in 1996 and 1997 *Kolya*, two years in a row, in 1999 *Pelíšky* (*Cosy Dens*), in 2001 *Tmavomodrý svět* (*A Dark Blue World*), in 2003 *Pupendo*, in 2005 *Román pro ženy* (*From Subway with Love*), in 2006 *Účastníci zájezdu*

(Holiday makers), in 2007 *Vratné lahve* (*Empties*), in 2008 *Bathory* (*Bathory: Countess of Blood*), in 2009 *Líbáš jako Bůh* (You kiss like a god), in 2010 *Ženy v pokušení* (Women in temptation), in 2011 *Muži v naději* (Men in hope), and in 2013 *Babovřesky*. These films were all Czech. Moreover, from 2000 to 2013 Czech cinema held a market share within its national borders that ranged between 20.5 per cent in 2000 and 39.7 per cent in 2008, the sole exception being a 10.1 percent share in 2002.[16] Czech cinema benefits little from state financial support, is little-known beyond the national borders and does not do too well at international film festivals;[17] nevertheless, the national audience appreciates it as part of a widespread appreciation for national culture. Eventually, this has produced a deadlocked situation, as characterised by film scholar Jan Bernard: 'Since 1989 Czech cinema is in great part a valued product on a market that cannot afford it.'[18] The reduced size of the Czech market does not provide enough revenue for the greater part of individual productions to recover their costs, despite the fact that the national product performs fairly well on the domestic market. Consequently, many companies have a precarious existence. Nonetheless, Czech cinema is a popular cinema indeed. I would like to add another reflection regarding this assertion: during the examined decade, the national TV broadcasting channel was the main film producer, as many observers have remarked,[19] while also playing a relevant role in fostering a specific mode of popular cinema: an allegedly auteur production. Other agencies, namely film criticism and awards such as the Czech Lion, often sanctioned this strategy. What came into being in this specific period might be termed 'popular art-house production', thanks to the Česká televize support, blending the search for a wide audience with the reference to established national aesthetic, political and moral values.

Popular art-house production conflates three main features: a narrative dominant in film representation through carefully conceived scripts; a reflection on national history from a worm's-eye view, as ordinary people experienced it in everyday life;[20] a notion of auteur as a 'humanist artist' focused on humanity's supreme values rather than on artistry or intellectual concerns. Accordingly, the director is less a personality developing his or her expression through a reflection on cinematic representation and its means, and rather is someone achieving artistic identity by portraying through clear narratives the fate of (mostly stereotypically masculine)

Czech everymen. Among the products of such production values are the highest grossing films in the chosen period in the Czech Republic: *Kolya*, *Cosy Dens*, *Musíme si pomáhat* (*Divided We Fall*, 2000), *Rebelové* (Rebels, 2001), *A Dark Blue World*, *Pupendo*. As emerges from this list, those primarily responsible for this production are film director Jan Svěrák and his father, Zdeněk Svěrák, as both actor and scriptwriter; director Jan Hřebejk; and screenplay writer Petr Jarchovský.[21] Česká televize co-produced all the above-mentioned films set in the historical past, and the Cinema Support and Development State Fund supported such films. Producers such as Jaroslav Kučera (for Česká televize) and Ondřej Halada (on the cinema end) played paramount roles. All these films place at their core masculine Czech John Does who are forced by the hardships of history to test themselves and their nation. A variation on this theme are the narratives in which a child or adolescent observes the contradictions of adulthood within historical processes, as in *Obecná škola* (*The Elementary School*, 1991) and *Cosy Dens*. These films promote a model of popular cinema based on the notion of ordinariness: everyday people confronting enormous historical events – World War II, anti-Semitism, Stalinism and Neostalinism – by retreating into their own privacy and enduring. When considered from the perspective of film genre, all of these films display a blend of comedy and drama as the most viable option to convey tragic events through the lens of everyday life: an experience conceived of as human, permanent and before and beyond history.

Furthermore, such narratives have two major advantages: they refer to a shared national experience and convey a pedagogy – they teach how things were for 'common people'.[22] By moulding history into tragicomedy, they downsize knowledge into a viable product for both TV broadcast and international sales, as the involvement of British producers in both *Kolya* and *A Dark Blue World* illustrates. The conflation of the national past, humanism – which has often been referred to as the typical Czech tolerance (*laskavost*) and is circulated abroad as 'irony'– and linear narrative create a popular product circulating beyond theatrical exhibition: most of the titles already mentioned were broadcasted and achieved significant success in terms of market share.[23]

Finally, this template resonates with past cinematic heritage: the least critical members of the Czech New Wave (for example, Jiří Menzel) became

renowned for their tragicomic look at history. Furthermore, tragicomedy removes contradictions, or at least looks at them through a benign lens; accordingly, it produces non-divisive narratives. It is not accidental that all of the above-mentioned films depict a wide spectrum of social and political behaviours and through the storytelling process bring them all together. A large number of these narratives are collective, that is, they are embodied by a large group of people as a way to cope with differences, and they depict an image of the nation as an organism that is enduring historical shifts.[24] Here, history is brought back into a domestic and private arena: the house around which all the events revolve, down-scaling major dramas to human feelings. It is not only a way to reduce world tragedies to laughable matters but also a way to avoid a confrontation with international film genres and preserve a national lineage which meets a popular demand. Rendering past experience is a way to maintain a cultural and cinematic heritage that is rooted in popular audiovisual consumption, as screenwriter Jarchovský explained in the mid-1990s:

> After the experience with Bolshevism we cannot produce allegories on the now-ruling early days of capitalism, with which two or three different generations of people are totally unfamiliar [...] This is the reason why some more challenging films turn back to the past, which we, however, look at from a new perspective. Authors [of Czech films] would like [...] to start over [...] but paradoxically they refer to a situation that they know only in a mediated way. Accordingly, they take as reality (as a verified reality) genres such as, for instance, the American crime movie or action movie, and they just don't care about how that reality is applicable here.[25]

A good example of this kind of production is *Cosy Dens*. Set between December 1967 and August 1968, that is, during the Prague Spring and its brutal ending at the hands of Polish, East German, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Soviet troops, the film tells the story of two families. The Kraus family is ruled by a former World War II aviator (Jiří Kodet), an embittered hero representing nostalgia for the democratic traditions of the interwar republic and opposition to the socialist state. The second family, the Šebeks, is more varied and warm, but the father (Miroslav Donutil) is a military officer who glorifies whenever possible the great achievements of socialism.

The nine months between Christmas and the Soviet invasion are seen from the vantage point of Michal Šebek (Michael Beran), an adolescent whose first, unlucky, love is Jindřiška Kraus (Krystýna Nováková), the girlfriend of his friend Elien (Ondřej Brousek). This latter is the well-off son of parents who presumably have been favourably introduced to the Communist party hierarchy, as they are living in the USA and sending Elien gifts of Western goods, which provoke Jindřiška's admiration and Michal's envy. Elien has international friends in his dormitory, and he screens French and Hollywood movies for them. After Mr Kraus becomes a widower, he soon marries Michal's aunt, a teacher at the school where her nephew, Jindřiška and Elien are pupils. Divided national identities, memories and experience – such as those belonging to committed Communists and dissidents, parents and children – are thus reunited. On the night the wedding is celebrated, Soviet tanks enter Czechoslovakia and bring to an end both the Prague Spring and Michal's hopes of love: the newlyweds and Jindřiška flee to the U.K. Conceived as a TV production, *Cosy Dens* is replete with references to late 1960s everyday life: popular songs, goods, objects, clothes punctuate the narrative. History is an ordinary matter and has little to do with the dramatic processes. The forced resignation of Stalinist President Antonín Novotný and the subsequent election of Ludvík Svoboda are reduced to a quick change of the portraits displayed in public buildings. The narrative space is scaled down to a few streets in Prague 5, where the story is set. The Soviet invasion is downsized to the acoustic vibrations that the invaders and their vehicles produce on the model aeroplanes Mr Kraus has constructed. *Cosy Dens*' narrative sympathises with heart-broken adolescents, makes fun of Michal's father's boasting glorification of socialist achievements and looks with compassion at Mr Kraus's broken and outdated democratic hopes, all the while depicting from a distance the drama of the Soviet invasion.

Cosy Dens epitomises tragicomedies representing the national past: these films offer a rendition of problematic past periods that is rooted in everyday, domestic experience conveyed by a linear, causal narrative. Such productions receive sanction through the award that the Česká Filmová a Televizní Akademie (Czech Film and Television Academy) bestows annually.[26] They represent top-down popular culture, as the Czech Lion award and institutional policies promote and support these products,

which nonetheless meet widespread demand. To summarise: state institutions support this kind of film on the basis that they mirror national cultural values, that is, crucial moments in national history and their intimate humanism; the national broadcasting channel co-produces and later on broadcasts them; the media milieu bestows awards on them; and established critics praise them. However, even though all this seems to conjure up a high-brow, well-designed institutional policy, the national audience enjoys and appreciates these products.

Side by side with this 'popular art-house production' is a traditional popular one, maintaining such national literary, theatre and film genres as the fairy tale and the farce. This trend includes popular comedies, such as *Trhala fialky dynamitem* (She picked up the violets with dynamite, 1992), *Konec básníku v Čechách* (The end of poets in Bohemia, 1993), *Byl jednou jeden polda* (*There Once Was a Cop*, 1995), or fairy tales such as *Princezna ze mlejna* (*The Watermill Princess*, 1994) and *Jak si zasloužit princeznu* (*How to Deserve a Princess*, 1995). These films often rely on professionals already active in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Vít Olmer, Jaroslav Soukup, Dušan Klein, or Zdeněk Troška.[27] Frequently they are serial creations, with one film following another, based on the same simple plot, set, characters and title. If one of the characteristics of popular culture, as Fiske puts it,[28] is *not* being self-sufficient, these films fit perfectly into the notion. On the one hand, they often reference foreign film genres in order to imitate or make a parody of them, as in *Byl jednou jeden polda*, *Byl jednou jeden polda II: Major Maisner opět zasahuje* (*There Once Was a Cop: Major Maisner Strikes Again*, 1997) and *Byl jednou jeden polda III: Major Maisner a tančící drak* (There once was a cop: Major Maisner and the dancing dragon, 1999), which ape the *Police Academy* series. On the other hand, they create a serial universe whose components always refer to previous episodes. Most of these films exhibit a very loose narrative structure built around a succession of trivial gags and jokes: rather than a consistent and motivated narrative thread, traditional popular films line up scenes that are almost self-contained. Finally, they show a grotesque universe, in the sense that Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin attributed to the notion; that is, revolving almost entirely around the body and sexuality[29] and evoking an implausible corporeal world, engorged with secretions, sexual intercourse, masquerading and magic. The farcical universe ignores likelihood and

prefers supernatural solutions, inasmuch as they are needed to advance storytelling.

However, the world of farces and fairy tales is no less self-centred than the one exhibited in historical tragicomedies: the same familiar places, faces, situations repeat, and so does a blatant repulsion exhibited towards foreigners and sexual difference.[30] These products frequently figure among the ten highest grossing films and sometimes top the ranks.[31] Established film criticism scorns such productions as lacking any feature that would qualify as film art. In the period from the mid-1990s through the twenty-first century's first five years, film critics awarded another prize together with the Czech Lion, the Plyšový lev (Plush Lion), which was bestowed on the worst Czech film of the year. For three years in a row, this 'award' went to a series of films directed by Zdeněk Troška: *Kameňák 1* (2003), *Kameňák 2* (2004) and *Kameňák 3* (2005).[32] For his part, Troška was no less disdainful towards the established media elite, and he left the Czech Film and Television Academy in 2002, as he disagreed with the handling of the national film awards.[33]

Set in the imaginary South Bohemian village of Kameňákov, Troška's series presents the comic adventures of Pepa, chief of the local police, his wife Vilma, and the village inhabitants. Although this latter group includes all social classes, the films depict a society whose members share the same experience: an eternal present. The three films all start with an external view of Pepa's house, a subtitle indicating a day of the week, or in the case of *Kameňák 3* the more metaphorical 'Everyday', followed by a scene of sexual intercourse between Pepa and Vilma. The village seems to exist outside history; and yet there is nothing outside the village, as all the situations take place within its boundaries. Time does not affect its inhabitants, since at the end of the first film a magic fountain is found, providing those who benefit from it with extraordinary sexual energy. The few people who join the community in the subsequent films are marked as sexually and/or ethnically ambiguous: a homosexual aristocratic and a group of Roma.

Historical tragicomedies and popular farces could not look more different: the former being based on a clear narrative, renowned historical periods and psychologically motivated characters, and directed with an allegedly auteur; the latter composed of a series of gags set in a timeless place, with characters little more than rough sketches and a very simple

mise-en-scène. However, a number of features are shared, and in my opinion these constitute a deeper layer, defining Czech popular culture. First, the world revolves around the family or a community; both are internally varied and conflictual but coalesce when facing intrusion from without. This same structure is also maintained in other major box-office successes, such as *Holiday makers*, in which a group of Czech people go on vacation to the Adriatic shore but never interact with anybody outside their group.[34]

The second shared feature is that the storytelling glorifies and pivots around the Czech man in his plebeian persona, whether it be Pepa in *Kameňák* or an apparently more refined version such as Oliver in *From Subway with Love*. Recently, scholars such as Mazierska, Kristensen and Näripea have discussed post-communist cinema and culture as post-colonial, emerging from a past made up of Soviet dominion but also entering one of new, globalised interdependence.[35] If we admit that post-1989 Czech cinema is a post-colonial one, not least because it emerged after 40 years of Soviet control, we might also draw some conclusions about the strategies it makes use of, in order to define its specificity against past and present external hegemonic powers. In fact, Czech cinema looks condescendingly at uncultivated colonisers, be they contemporary Americans as in *From Subway with Love*, or Russians in an earlier time, as in *Cosy Dens* and *Kolya*. Czech films exhibit a no less contemptuous regard for Czechs who emigrate abroad, as in *Teddy Bear* and *Beauty in Trouble*. These narratives project the Czech type as a white man who is natural and sexually powerful when confronted with decadent Westerners, and whose cultivation is made clear against the gross grain of imperialist nations.

Third, both kinds of popular cinema tighten up social bonds by depicting unanimous communities enduring social or historical transformations. A paramount strategy to achieve what might be termed a 'palatable past' is nostalgia, as produced through goods. Works such as *Cosy Dens* or *Rebels* revolve around nostalgia for lost objects of the 1960s and depict the characters' dreams of consumption. These same dreams – sexual and economic – lie at the core of successful comic teen-pics such as *Snowboarďáci* (Snowboarders, 2004) or *Raftťáci* (Rafters, 2006), which update traditional farces. If popular culture has to do with people's desires and meanings, then these films display objects of desire.

Finally, when looking at the circulation of these films, it is indeed telling to discover their second life in TV broadcasting. Tragicomedies are part of a media diet prolonging TV serials of the Normalisation era, fairy-tale films and farces. For instance, in 2000 *Cosy Dens* held the highest share (67 per cent!) when ČT1 (Česká televize 1) broadcasted it, but in the same year, *Třicet případů Majora Zemana* (Major Zeman's thirty cases), a reprise of a popular serial of the 1970s, was also among the Top Ten shows.[36] In 2001 Zdeněk Troška's fairy tale *The Watermill Princess II* enjoyed similar success (66 percent), followed by a contemporary fairy-tale serial.[37] In 2002 *Rebels* was the second most popular broadcasted program, and *The Watermill Princess* and *The Watermill Princess II* were sixth and eighth respectively.[38] Just a year later, ČT1 launched a new serial, *Nemocnice na kraji města po dvaceti letech* (Hospital at the end of the city after twenty years), a sequel to a very popular TV serial of the late 1970s/early 1980s.[39] What emerges from a look at national broadcasting in the selected period is its consistency with 1970s and 1980s popular culture. Coherence was produced through the persistence of specific genres, such as the farce and the fairytale, and the continuity in the careers of individual filmmakers, such as Zdeněk Troška or Zdeněk Svěrák. It was also achieved by repeating successful programs or films from the past, or by producing sequels fostering a related popular culture. Finally, this consistency was nurtured through a nostalgic look at the past, releasing the nation from past accountability and coping with guilt and suffering through narratives of reconciliation, such as those offered in *Cosy Dens* or *Pupendo*, or in analogous TV shows.[40] This popular culture is conceived as proudly national, and it cuts across divides between high- and low-brow forms.

By way of conclusion, I would first like to highlight the fact that in the chosen period both high- and low-brow films were successful in terms of attendance. However, they are also revealed to have become popular by perpetuating anthropologically meaningful cultural and consumption forms: an appreciation of plebeian characters; a reluctance to include anything not identified with the national experience, leading to open xenophobia in a number of occurrences; a focus on closely packed social groups that endure the external circumstances that affect them. Second, we might notice an attempt to detach national culture from previous experiences by fostering a self-critical look at past media production: an attempt supported

through institutional policies (the Cinema Support and Development State Fund), realised through institutional agencies (Czech national television) and praised by established organisms, such as film criticism and national film awards. These agencies not only confer merit but also disavow traditional popular products, for example, through markers as the Plush Lion; they intend to nurture an updated and cultivated popular culture, as opposed to the trivial productions belonging to the Normalisation era or to private TV broadcasting, and namely in the period I am here focusing on.[41] Nonetheless, if we evaluate popular media practices, both in film theatres and in TV broadcasting, the two kinds of popular culture reveal themselves to be close. Finally, if popular culture is tightly connected to everyday life, we should not disregard the fact that both kinds of popular product make reference to a previous culture which appears to be still very present in popular consumption, through TV shows, remakes, sequels and home video products. Moreover, both types of popular product hint at goods, habits and social formations that are embedded in the national experience.

In one of the most hilarious scenes in *Cosy Dens*, Mr Šebek gifts the newlywed couple with a set of plastic spoons produced in the former German Democratic Republic. When presenting the gift, he explains: 'These are no usual spoons!' The groom, the bride and all the banqueters stir their coffee with the brand new spoons, which melt in the hot liquid. A plastic spoon is the central image on the film poster and on the DVD menu, and Mr Šebek's punch line continues to resonate. They were definitely lousy, cheap, everyday objects – and therein lies their enduring popularity.

Notes

1. An informative overview is in Peter Hames, 'A business like any other: Czech cinema since the Velvet Revolution', *Kinokultura*, Special issue iv (November 2006), pp. 1–37. http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/4/hames.shtml (accessed 19 May 2015).
2. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction', in R. Dyer and G. Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinemas* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 1–14.
3. I would favour a more nuanced notion of traditional culture. In Eastern European Socialism, traditional folk culture has been understood as something

related to a pre-modern creation, rooted in rural areas and population; accordingly, the true identity of the 'people' coincided with an unspoiled state of being, preceding modernity. I would instead prefer to also incorporate modern, urban folklore into the notion of 'traditional' culture, in order to include everyday modern experience.

4. A reasonable plea for combining audience and textual studies is in Rosalind Brunt, 'Engaging with the popular: audiences for mass culture and what to say about them,' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 69–76.
5. John Fiske, 'Understanding popular culture', in *Reading the Popular* (Winchester, 1989), p. 6.
6. Toby Miller, 'Cinema studies doesn't matter: or, I know what you did last semester', in M. Tinkcom, A. Villarejo (eds), *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies* (London and New York, 2001), p. 305.
7. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA, 1984).
8. A recent detailed survey on Czech film production describes four typologies of film production: a) mainstream art house; b) peripheral art house; c) mainstream commercial; d) peripheral commercial. The two kinds of popular cinema I am dealing with might be identified with a) and d), whereas in the second typology the notion of peripheral refers to an almost exclusively national target. See Petr Szczepanik and Collective, *Studie vývoje českého hraného filmového díla* (Brno 2015). My deepest gratitude to Petr Szczepanik for sharing the report with me.
9. For an overview of the interweaving of politics and culture in this field of study, see Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London and New York, 1992).

   For a discussion of Gramsci's legacy in British cultural studies, see David Forgacs, 'National-popular: genealogy of a concept,' in *Formations of Nation and People* (London, 1984), pp. 83–98.
10. Fiske, 'Understanding Popular Culture', p. 2.
11. See Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and New York, 2003).
12. For an account of the shift see Peter Hames, 'The Czech and Slovak Republics: the Velvet Revolution and after,' in C. Portuges and P. Hames (eds), *Cinemas in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), pp. 40–74. Unfortunately, the author mentions only English language sources.

    A first attempt at examining film distribution in the Czech Republic is in Helena Bendová and Tereza Dvořáková (eds), 'Distribuce filmů v Ceské republice v posledních letech,' *Cinepur* xxi (2002), pp. 21–31. A more encompassing survey is in Tereza Dvořáková (ed.), 'Contemporary Czech cinema,' *Iluminace* xix/1 (2007).

A broader scope on the transition from a state-driven to a market-driven economy is in Vladimír Kroupa and Milan Šmid, 'The limitations of a free market: Czech Republic,' in Eureka Audiovisual (eds), *The Development of the Audiovisual Landscape in Central Europe since 1989* (Luton, 1998), pp. 61–110.

13. The Czech Lion, a silver double-tailed lion against a red backdrop, has been Bohemia's coat of arms since the twelfth century, and metonymically came to represent Czech lands. Therefore, the award bestowed yearly on Czech film production is conceived as the purest symbol of national identity and pride.
14. The reference to the Academy Awards is intentional, because the Czech award aims at creating an aura of fame and high quality similar to the one surrounding the Oscar. Furthermore, the Czech Lion's awarding procedure and awards categories reflect those of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. See: http://www.filmovaakademie.cz/ (accessed 19 May 2015).

    Commentators and artists involved have compared the Czech award to the American one. See for instance: Mirka Spáčilová, 'Český lev: velká show v male kleci,' *MF Dnes*, 3 March 2002, http://kultura.idnes.cz/cesky-lev-velka-show-v-male-kleci-do3-/show_lev.aspx?c=A020301_172746_filmvideo_ef (accessed 15 May 2015); Mirka Spáčilová, 'Český lev sice zařval, ale koza opět přežila,' *MF Dnes*, 3 March 2002, http://kultura.idnes.cz/cesky-lev-sice-zarval-ale-koza-opet-prezila-fkc-/show_lev.aspx?c=A060116_211923_show_lev_kot (accessed 15 May 2015); Mirka Spáčilová, 'Jan Budař: Po Českém lvu jedině Oscary!', *MF Dnes*, 27 January 2007, http://kultura.idnes.cz/jan-budar-po-ceskem-lvu-jedine-oscary-dvx-/show_lev.aspx?c=A070127_673930_film-video_kot (accessed 19 May 2015).
15. See the data provided by the Association of Film Distributors at http://www.ufd.cz/prehledy-statistiky (accessed 19 May 2015).
16. A survey for the years 2000–2013 in http://filmcenter.cz/cz/uzitecne-informace/19 (accessed 19 May 2015). The above mentioned Association of Film Distributors offers statistics also referring to the years 1998 and 1999.

    The National Film Archive offers a yearbook including thorough surveys. See *Filmová ročenka 1992–2007* (Prague, 1993–2008).
17. The figures for film exports of new EC members show that Czech production in the period 1996–2012 is the most successful. However, these data include the Slovak market, which was the market originating more than 44 percent of Czech production EC revenues. See André Lange, 'The production and circulation of films from the EU new member states (1996–2012)' (paper presented at the Audiovisual Summit 'From MEDIA to CREATIVE EUROPE.The experiences of the MEDIA Programme in New Europe Countries. Challenges for the Future' organised by the Media Desk Poland and the Polish Ministry of Culture, Warsaw, 10–12 December 2013. http://www.obs.coe.int/en/country/czechrepublic (accessed 19 December 2015).

18. Jan Bernard in 'Jaký je český film po roce 1989?', *Film a doba*, lii/4 (Winter 2006), p. 212.
19. See Andrej Halada, *Český film devadesátých let. Od* Tankového praporu *ke* Koljovi (Prague, 1997).
20. See Peter Hames, 'The ironies of history: the Czech experience,' in A. Imre (ed.), *East European Cinemas* (London and New York, 2005), pp. 135–49.
21. It should not go unnoticed that in the half of the first decade of the twenty-first century both Hřebejk and Svěrák shifted this current to contemporary subjects, meeting with similar success, with films such as *Horem pádem* (*Up and Down*, 2004), *Kráska v nesnázích* (*Beauty in Trouble*, 2006), *Empties*, *Medvídek* (*Teddy Bear*, 2007), *Nestyda* (*Shameless*, 2008).
22. This pedagogical tendency was noticed from the inception, although in an exclusively appraising perspective. See Jan Lukeš, 'Obecná škola – Škola obce,' *Moveast* 4 (1992); now in Id., *Orgie střídmosti* (Prague, 1993), pp. 73–85.

    A more critical perspective on the gender and political implications of ordinariness is in Petra Hanáková, 'The construction of normality: the lineage of male figures in contemporary Czech cinema,' in J. van Leeuwen-Turnovcová and N. Richter (eds), *Mediale Welten in Tschechien nach 1989: Genderprojektionen und Codes des Plebejismus* (München, 2005), pp. 149–59.
23. The present survey did not take into account either home-video releases or internet viewings. However, I believe inquiries into this area of the audiovisual market could lead to a more encompassing picture.
24. A reflection on history in the work of Svěrák and Hřebejk is in Jaromír Blažejovský, 'Bitva o život,' *Film a doba* xlvii/4 (Winter 2001), pp. 179–84. See also Luboš Ptáček, 'Jejich pelechy a naše pelíšky. O rodině a národní identitě,' *Cinepur* 13 (May 1999), pp. 20–3.
25. Petr Jarchovský, quoted in Stanislav Ulver, 'Český film včera a dnes,' *Film a doba* xli/2 (Summer 1995), p. 58 and 60.
26. The award has been given to the following films set in a historical past: *Šakalí léta* (*Big Beat*) in 1993; *Díky za každé nové ráno* (Thanks for every new morning) in 1994; *Kolya* in 1996; *Je třeba zabít Sekala* (*Sekal Has To Die*) in 1998; *United We Stand* in 2000; *A Dark Blue World* was given the award for best direction in 2001; *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krála* (*I Served the King of England*) in 2006; *Protektor* (*Protector*) in 2009; *Ve stínu* (*In the Shadow*) in 2012; *Hořící keř* (*Burning Bush*), directed by Polish-born filmmaker Agnieszka Holland in 2013.
27. On Czech film comedy of the 1970s and 1980s see Petra Hanáková, '"The films we are ashamed of": Czech crazy comedy of the 1970s and 1980s,' in E. Näripea and A. Trossek (eds), *Via Transversa: Lost Cinema of the Former Eastern Bloc* (Tallin, 2008), pp. 109–21. Also to be found at http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/kp7_08_hanakova.pdf (accessed 20 May 2015).

28. See Fiske, 'Understanding Popular Culture'.
29. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Cambridge, MA, 1968).
30. A reflection on Czech popular cinema and gender and national diversity is to be found in Jan Čulík, *Jací jsme. Česká společnost v hraném filmu devadesátých a nultých let* (Brno, 2007).
31. This has been the case of the fairytale *Princezna ze mlejna II* (*The Watermill Princess II*) in 2000, and more recently of *Babovřesky* in 2013. Zdeněk Troška directed both films.
32. See 'Plyšového lva má Troškův Kameňák,' *MF Dnes*, 18 February 2004, http://kultura.idnes.cz/plysoveho-lva-ma-troskuv-kamenak-dq1-/show_lev.aspx?c=A040218_174915_filmvideo_jup (accessed 15 May 2015); Jitka Gráfová, 'Nejhorším filmem roku je druhý Kameňák,' *MF Dnes*, 24 February 2005, http://kultura.idnes.cz/nejhorsim-filmem-roku-je-druhy-kamenak-dyf-/show_lev.aspx?c=A050224_170640_tv_film_gra (accessed 15 May 2015); spa, 'Pomeje: Díky za lva z plyše,' *MF Dnes*, 5 March 2004, http://kultura.idnes.cz/pomeje-diky-za-lva-z-plyse-09j-/show_lev.aspx?c=2004M055O07E (accessed 15 May 2015); ČTK, 'Tvůrce Kameňáku nadchl plyšový hattrick,' *MF Dnes*, 23 February 2006, http://kultura.idnes.cz/tvurce-kamenaku-nadchl-plysovy-hattrick-ffr-/show_lev.aspx?c=A060223_174022_show_lev_kot (accessed 15 May 2015).

    Recently, the series had an unsuccessful sequel: *Kameňák 4* (2013).
33. See ČTK, 'Troška vystoupil z filmové akademie,' *MF Dnes*, 3 March 2002, http://kultura.idnes.cz/troska-vystoupil-z-filmove-akademie-dv0-/show_lev.aspx?c=A020321_143616_filmvideo_brt (accessed 15 May 2015). Troška also directed quite successful series as *Slunce, seno, jahody* (Sun, hay, strawberries, 1984), *Slunce, seno, a párfacek* (Sun, hay, and a pair of slaps, 1989), and *Slunce, seno, erotica* (Sun, hay, eroticism, 1991), and *The Watermill Princess* and *The Watermill Princess II*.
34. This attitude is mirrored in Czech cinema's professional culture, whose members seem to ignore or dismiss foreign film production. See Petr Szczepanik and Collective, *Studie vývoje českého hraného filmového díla*, pp. 5–6.
35. See Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen and Eva Näripea, 'Postcolonial theory and the Postcommunist World,' in E. Mazierska, L. Kristensen and E. Näripea (eds), *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema. Portraying Neighbours On-Screen* (London and New York, 2014), pp. 1–39.
36. See http://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/sledovanost/zebricky/2000_celkove/50_nejsled_ct1_2000.pdf (accessed 20 May 2015).
37. http://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/sledovanost/zebricky/2001_celkove/nejsled_2001.pdf (accessed 20 May 2015).
38. http://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/sledovanost/zebricky/2002_celkove/50_nejsled_ct1_2002.pdf (accessed 20 May 2015).

39. See http://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/sledovanost/zebricky/2003_celkove/50_nejsled_ct1_2003.pdf (accessed 20 May 2015).
40. See Irena Carpentier Reifová, Kateřina Gillárová and Radim Hladík, 'The way we applauded: how popular culture stimulates collective memory of the Socialist past in Czechoslovakia – the case of the television serial *Vyprávěj* and its viewers,' in A. Imre, T. Havens and K. Lustyik (eds), *Popular Television in Eastern and Southern Europe* (London and New York, 2012), pp. 199–221.
41. This emerges quite clearly from the harsh discussions held in the forum of the daily newspaper *MF Dnes*, which I mainly scrutinised in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In such forum, Troška is repeatedly judged as an idiot, or addressed as 'Comrade', and his fans are characterised as passive viewers of the private TV channel Nova. See 'Diskuse ke článku 'Plyšového lva má Troškův Kameňák', *MF Dnes*, http://kultura.idnes.cz/diskuse.aspx?iddiskuse=A040218_174915_filmvideo_jup (accessed 21 May 2015). *Babovřesky*'s huge success prompted one contributor to say that the Czech nation deserves to experience genocide. See http://www.csfd.cz/film/316428-babovresky/ (accessed 21 May 2015).

13

The Power of Love

Polish Post-communist Popular Cinema

Elżbieta Ostrowska

In his discussion of the significance of the collapse of communism in Europe, Michael Kennedy writes: 'It is a cliché. The world was dramatically transformed in 1989, much as it was in 1789 or 1848. Political and economic systems and everyday lives were radically changed. Transition typically names this epoch whose two mantras – from plan to market and from dictatorship to democracy – anchored a new liberal hegemony in the world and especially in Eastern Europe'.[1] The mantra metaphor implies that the economic and political transition is not a process that can be rationally planned and executed. Indeed, these transformations have not proceeded as smoothly and predictably as expected. Slavoj Žižek comments on the utopian expectations of post-communist societies after 1989, 'they wanted free-market democracy while also retaining the previous social security provided by the planned economy of communism.'[2] The socio-political reality of post-1989 Poland, like that of any other country within the former Eastern Bloc, has been far removed from such a utopian vision. Hence, collective frustration, disappointment and a feeling of things being 'inadequate' rapidly followed the initial euphoria caused by the political turnover.[3] Cultural production, including popular cinema, has responded to the conflicting forces acting upon post-communist society.