5. THE CZECHOSLOVAK NEW WAVE

A revolution denied

Peter Hames

Introduction

The state of Czechoslovakia came into being in 1918 following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, and the borders of the new country were confirmed by the peace settlement of 1919. During the Austro-Hungarian period, the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia had been ruled from Vienna, while Slovakia had been a part of Hungary. Despite their close linguistic links, this was the first time that the two nations had been politically united for more than a thousand years. The union did not survive in the post-Soviet era, and the country divided into the Czech and Slovak republics in 1993.

While filmmaking in the Czech lands has a long history dating back to the 1890s productions of Jan Kříženecký, Czech cinema did not make a major international impact until the 1960s, with the advent of what, echoing the term used to describe developments in France in the late 1950s, came to be known as a 'new wave'. Despite regular and substantial production since the end of this period, Czech cinema has never recovered the international reputation it then enjoyed. Slovakia, where feature film production did not develop until after the Second World War, has never achieved the same international recognition, even though it is accurate to speak of a Slovak, as well as of a Czech, new wave. The two industries must nonetheless be considered together, as differing parts of a common culture.

Of course, international commercial and critical success are not the same; they arise from a range of factors, of which the quality of the films is only one.

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Apart from the widely acclaimed releases of the 1960s new wave, films of international significance have been produced throughout the more than seven decades of modern Czechoslovak history. Gustav Machatý, the first Czech 'art film' director, made films in the 1920s and 1930s (*The Kreutzer Sonata* (*Kreutzerova sonáta*), *Erotikon*, *Ecstasy* (*Extase*)). The animated films of Jiří Trnka and Karel Zeman enjoyed a world reputation in the 1950s, while the subversive surrealist films of Jan Švankmajer were produced mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. Jan Svěrák's *Kolya* (*Kolja*) won an Oscar in the 1990s.

Given the predominant 'western' mindset that sees Central and Eastern European countries as waiting for 'enlightenment'[1] and economic/industrial development, and as reflectors or recipients of cultural benefits from the outside, many significant cultural developments have remained strictly internal, receiving little attention in the West. The Czech and Slovak films granted 'international' significance are therefore those that have been screened or have won awards at West European festivals and, more rarely, attracted the interest of the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The selection processes involved in such forms of recognition are hardly weighted in favour of Central and Eastern European productions. And yet there have also been times, especially in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s, when the communist authorities in Czechoslovakia were anxious that particular titles should not receive the oxygen of Western publicity, thus making it difficult for important films to become known outside the country.

This was not true during the 1930s, when the country enjoyed democratic rule. At the second international film festival at Venice in 1934, three Czech and Slovak films attracted attention: Machatý's 'scandalous' and lyrical *Ecstasy*, featuring Hedy Kiesler (later Lamarr), condemned by the Vatican, Josef Rovenský's equally lyrical *The River* (*Řeka*) and Karel Plicka's record of Slovak folk culture, *The Earth Sings* (*Zem spieva*), edited by Alexandr Hackenschmied (who later, in the USA, as Alexander Hammid, worked as photographer and co-director of several of Maya Deren's avant-garde films). All three of these productions are dominated by their pastoral settings, with Jan Stallich's photography on *Ecstasy* and *The River* forming the prototype of what came to be known as 'Czech lyricism'. Both *Ecstasy* and *The River* did substantial overseas business. Czechoslovak films achieved further successes at Venice in succeeding years.

The Beginnings of the New Wave: the Rejection of Socialist Realism

While the lyrical and poetic tradition continues to be an important element in Czech filmmaking, this aesthetic was not the primary ingredient in the movement that came to be known as the Czech new wave (1963–69). The term 'new wave', much like its French equivalent, referred to a group of directors who

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came to prominence in the early 1960s and produced an extremely varied group of films that not only won awards at international festivals (including two Oscars), but spearheaded the first significant inroad of Czech and Slovak films into international markets. Director Miloš Forman has often stated that his generation of filmmakers was less influenced by outside influences (including domestic ones) than by their own reaction against the 'bad' films they saw around them. They were determined to replace the propaganda images of Socialist Realism, the official aesthetic of the Soviet bloc countries, with those of real life.

The Czech new wave depended on the talents of a substantial group of young directors, almost all of whom produced debut features that achieved domestic and international recognition: Miloš Forman (*Black Peter/Peter and Pavla* (*Černý Petr*), 1963), Věra Chytilová (*Something Different* (*O něčem jiném*), 1963), Jaromil Jireš (*The Cry* (*Křik*), 1963), Jan Němec (*Diamonds of the Night* (*Démanty noci*), 1964), Pavel Juráček and Jan Schmidt (*Postava k podpírání* (*Josef Kilián*), 1964), Evald Schorm (*Everyday Courage* (*Každý den odvahu*), 1964), Ivan Passer (*Intimate Lighting* (*Intimní osvětlení*), 1965), Hynek Bočan (*No Laughing Matter* (*Nikdo se nebude smát*), 1965), Antonín Máša (*Wandering* (*Bloudění*), 1965) and Jiří Menzel (*Closely Observed Trains/Closely Watched Trains* (*Ostře sledované vlaky*), 1966). Other directors of the same generation included Juraj Herz (*The Sign of Cancer* (*Znamení Raka*), 1966), Karel Vachek (*Elective Affinities* (*Spřízněni volbou*), 1968), Drahomíra Vihanová (*Deadly Sunday* (*Zabitá neděle*), 1969) and Zdenek Sirový, best known for his *Funeral Rites* (*Smuteční slavnost*, 1969).

Slovak cinema, though dependent on different institutional structures throughout the Communist period, interacted with these developments at various stages. Štefan Uher, who made his debut in 1958, made an important precursor of the wave with his *Sunshine in a Net* (*Slnko v sieti*, 1962), while the Slovak wave proper established itself in the late 1960s with the work of Juraj Jakubisko (*Crucial Years/Christ's Years* (*Kristove roky*), 1967), Dušan Hanák (*322*, 1969) and Elo Havetta (*Party in the Botanical Garden* (*Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade*), 1969). But defining the new wave solely as a movement of directors who made their debuts in the 1960s also poses problems. How should we classify the Slovak-Czech duo of Ján Kádar and Elmar Klos, who took co-directing credits on one of the most internationally acclaimed productions of the era, the Oscar-winning *A Shop on the High Street/The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965); Vojtěch Jasný, whose *All My Good Countrymen* (*Všichni dobří rodáci*, 1968) won the Best Direction prize at Cannes in 1969; Karel Kachyňa, whose *The Ear* (*Ucho*, 1969) attracted much attention at Cannes in 1990 when it was released after a twenty-year ban; and František Vláčil, whose *Marketa Lazarová* (1967) was voted the best Czech film of all time in 1998? Technically, these were not members of the

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'wave', having made their debuts in 1938 (Klos), 1945 (Kádar), and 1950 (Jasný, Kachyňa,Vláčil). The Czechoslovak new wave was not just a 'jeune cinéma', a youth movement in the French tradition reacting against an older generation. There was an interaction between generations in which different groups challenged the status quo and they employed a range of thematic and stylistic elements.

The film industry was nationalised in 1945, three years before the Communist takeover of 1948 on the basis of plans formulated during the war by a group centred on the Czechoslovak Film Society. The purpose of nationalisation was not to promote orthodoxy by producing official propaganda; it was to encourage a freedom of expression that was restricted in a system driven purely by profit. As Czech critics have pointed out, in a country limited by size and language (in that the Czech language has limited international usage), the notion of a subsidised culture was hardly new or original. State sponsorship was normal for museums and galleries, for theatrical and musical performance. If the cinema was seen as part of this wider culture, then nationalisation, which could protect it in some degree from foreign competition, was by no means a radical development. In fact, the Czech 'new wave' of the 1960s can be seen as a realisation of the hopes for and potential of a system based on the notion of public service.

Although the Communist leader, Klement Gottwald (President 1948–53), had promised that artistic orthodoxy would not be a characteristic of the 'Czechoslovak road to socialism', the Soviet model of Socialist Realism was rapidly and extensively applied, not least in the cinema. It is notable that film production (typically between thirty and forty features a year prior to 1989, when it dropped to fifteen to twenty) was reduced to some ten to twelve features a year at the height of Stalinist control in the early 1950s. Socialist Realism prescribed a standardised plot whose politically optimistic (i.e. pro-socialist) ending resulted from nominal conflicts between 'positive' and 'negative' characters. Such narratives represented society not as it was but as it ought to develop. While the chain of cause and effect followed the 'rules' of classical narrative, the ideological and class bases of the characters were often made verbally explicit. As Herbert Eagle has observed, 'characters represent their value systems clearly, and conflicts are seen in unambiguous terms . . . The official socialist realist system . . . encouraged the production of grossly distorted representations of actual life and actual history'.[2]

THE EARLY FILMS OF FORMAN, CHYTILOVÁ AND JIREŠ

The first films of Forman, Chytilová and Jireš (all 1963) offered striking contrasts to this sanitised and propagandistic view of reality. In Forman's *Black Peter*, the hero, Petr is an employee in a supermarket who is unsuccessful in

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both his work and in his love life. As 'store detective', he gazes in bewilderment as a woman fills her bag from the shelves. As well as presenting a character who does not conform at all to Socialist Realist guidelines, the film offered a portrait of everyday reality without the approved stereotypes.

In her debut feature, Chytilová followed the *cinéma vérité* inclinations of her short film *A Bagful of Fleas* (*Pytel blech*, 1962), set among factory girls. *Something Different* recounts the training of the gymnast, Eva Bosáková, concluding with the success she achieves in the world championships. Chytilová juxtaposes this real story with a fictional account of a married woman who, locked into a sterile marriage, conducts a secret affair. The film interrogates two different lifestyles, analysing female roles. The striking structural combination of fiction and documentary singles the director out as a pioneer in the development of women's cinema.

In Jireš's *The Cry*, the hero is a television repairman whose wife is expecting her first baby. Facing a future as a father, he answers a number of service calls that bring him into contact with a cross-section of society. These chance encounters touch on the threat of war, the promise of sexual infidelity, the cynicism of bureaucrats and the existence of racism. The film provides a portrait of the far from perfect world into which the child will be born. While *The Cry* hardly presents a positive view of reality, its complex deployment of flashbacks and flashforwards, combined with a lyrical style, give it an energy and poignancy that were to prove characteristic of much of Jireš's later work.

Despite their joint concern with rejecting 'official' reality, the three directors had different starting points, with both Chytilová and Jireš pursuing more formal interests in their later work, even as Forman (in his American films) made a place for himself within more mainstream commercial cinema. In fact, the training of the filmmakers at FAMU (the Prague Film School) had laid an emphasis on students developing their own individual styles. This emphasis on creativity rather than orthodoxy led to a sustained commitment to what is now termed 'auteur' cinema.

Nonetheless, it's also true that Forman's style was shared by his colleagues and collaborators, Ivan Passer and Jaroslav Papoušek (*The Best Age* (*Nejkrásnější věk*), 1968), both of whom developed variations on what can be regarded as a group style. Forman himself has always emphasised the collaborative nature of their shared endeavours (in fact this was something he missed when working on his first American films). In their use of themes from everyday life, non-actors and a style based on observation, they were clearly influenced by Italian neorealism. In fact, in his emphasis on ordinary people observed at work (*Black Peter*, *Loves of a Blonde*/*A Blonde in Love* (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky*), 1965), Forman was following in the path of that movement's latter-day exponent, Ermanno Olmi (*Il Posto*, 1961). Passer's *Intimate Lighting*, which deals with a visit to the country by a classical musician and his

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girlfriend, is arguably more 'middle class' in its orientation, but is an extraordinarily perceptive study of relationships. Forman's *The Firemen's Ball/It's Burning, My Love!* (*Hoří má panenko!*, 1967), the comic study of how a local fire brigade fails in its attempts to organise both a raffle and a beauty competition, was perceived, even before it was filmed, as something more, as an attack on the Communist Party itself. Forman's respect for ordinary people, often praised in his earlier work, here turned more satirical, striking into what one critic identified as 'the spiritual heart of Stalinism'. The film's deglamourised portrait of young beauty competitors was disapproved of by an unlikely – but perhaps predictable – alliance of Italian co-producer Carlo Ponti, Communist bureaucrats and US film distributors.

Chytilová's subsequent pictures showcase her interest in formal innovation and creating 'outside the rules' and her *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky*, 1966) and *The Fruit of Paradise* (*Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*, 1969) are two of the few avant-garde films made anywhere under conditions of feature production. *Daisies* is a Dadaist farce in which, as Herbert Eagle[3] suggests, the principle of anarchy is balanced by one of structure. It tells of the adventures of two alienated teenagers who decide that, since the world is meaningless, everything is permitted. In fact, *Daisies* is an entirely non-narrative film based on the principles of the game (the game the girls play is called 'it matters – it doesn't matter'). The characters have no individuality, no psychology, and the film itself can best be described as a sequence of happenings unified by a concern with food. As her co-scriptwriter Ester Krumbachová put it, the filmmakers decided, apart from a few basic dialogues, to be bound by absolutely nothing. Chytilová's cinematographer (and husband) Jaroslav Kučera, observed that, in most films, images were always 'of something' and were fundamentally illustrative. In *Daisies*, he was interested in images that might create their own meaning, as in abstract art.

If possible, *The Fruit of Paradise* is even more opaque. Made in collaboration with a provincial theatre group, it treats the relationship between a man and his wife (based on the prototype of Adam and Eve) and her tempting by the somewhat more fascinating Robert (the devil). While drawing more on theatre and avoiding the montage style of *Daisies*, Kučera's cinematography produces some rich textural effects that are enhanced by a powerful music score by Zdeněk Liška.

Jireš's second feature was made in collaboration with the novelist, Milan Kundera, who was also a lecturer at FAMU. Though based on his *The Joke* (*Žert*), the screenplay was prepared before the novel's publication in 1967, and the film completed production in the months following the Soviet invasion of 1968. Ludvík, the film's hero, had been condemned in the 1950s to work in the 'black units' (penal battalions) after taunting his Stalinist girlfriend with the subversive phrase 'Long Live Trotsky!' on a postcard. Released during the

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1960s, he determines to revenge himself on his former best friend who had chaired the student group that condemned him. His chosen method, the seduction and abuse of his friend's wife, proves revenge to be counter-productive. *The Joke*'s strength lies in the way in which it juxtaposes moments from the story's two time periods, provoking reflection on the connection between a past too subject to moral simplification and a supposedly 'reformist' present.

The film gives the lie to the frequent (western) charge that the Czech new wave, unlike Godard and Gorin's 'counter cinema' or Latin American 'Third Cinema', was unpolitical. The targets were different, of course – not capitalism, but rather state socialism. If there was no scope for a cinema outside of state subsidy, it was also quite apparent that the reform movement within Czechoslovak Communism was reflected widely within, and often spearheaded by, the films of the 'new wave'.

Of course, in a society were everything was politicised, deviating from the approved viewpoint became a political matter. Documenting everyday life as it was experienced, as did Forman and Passer, and dissenting from approved aesthetic principles, as did Chytilová, became a matter of politics since the authorities preferred society to be depicted in an idealised manner and in conventional forms. Given the mass media orthodoxies of globalised culture, it could be argued that such strategies also have their political role elsewhere.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL CINEMA

In the mid-1960s, the most explicit criticism came from the works of Evald Schorm, in particular *Everyday Courage* and *Return of the Prodigal Son* (*Návrat ztraceného syna*, 1966). Written by Antonín Máša, *Everyday Courage*'s central character is a political activist; the film reflects critically on both his mission and also on wider social developments. Committed to the building of a socialist society, the protagonist finds his image of certainty collapsing all around him. Schorm's approach to this subject is sympathetic, but the film nonetheless suggests the existence of a social crisis and was blacklisted by President Novotný for a year. In *Return of the Prodigal Son*, Schorm examines the case of an intellectual who attempts suicide and is admitted to a mental hospital. The film demonstrates that the man's mental condition is linked to the problems of society as a whole, and in this way it explicitly addresses moral questions of principle and compromise.

Prior to 1968 and the advent of the political reforms of the Prague Spring, films often addressed political issues in an indirect, oblique or Kafkaesque manner. Jan Němec's *Diamonds of the Night* focuses on two Jewish boys escaping from a Nazi death train to create a film that addresses themes of youth and age, life and death, hunters and the hunted. Lifted out of the real world, the narrative offers neither socialist solutions nor a clear ending. Pavel Juráček's

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and Jan Schmidt's *Josef Kilián* explicitly refers to the Kafkaesque absurd in its comic story about a man led on a journey through an increasingly sinister and meaninglessly bureaucratic society.

In 1966, Němec made what was probably the most critical of all new wave films: *The Party and the Guests/A Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*). The story involves a group of people on a picnic who are 'invited' to an open-air birthday party for a political leader. Reminiscent of Václav Havel's plays, this absurdist story is constructed from largely 'meaningless' dialogue, comprising such incidents as an 'interrogation' by the secret police, attempts to impose order on disorderly guests, sycophantic speeches, visions of an idyllic future and the pursuit of a missing guest with hunting dogs. Intriguingly, director Evald Schorm plays the guest who flees the scene, refusing to participate in the overall conformity. Prominent members of the Prague intellectual community played many of the main roles. Juráček's *A Case for the New Hangman/A Case for a Rookie Hangman* (*Případ pro začínajího kata*, 1968), based on the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, similarly takes its protagonist on a journey through the structures of power. While the targets of these films would have been fairly clear to a Czech audience, it is equally true to say that the films apply to all structures of bureaucratised power, which of course were not (and are not) limited to Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

Overt criticism of Communist policies only became possible during the Prague Spring of 1968, when attempts to renew the egalitarian and democratic traditions of socialism allowed for a critical review of policies that had been followed since the 1950s. *The Joke* has already been discussed, but Jasný's *All My Good Countrymen* presented a damning portrait of the collectivisation of agriculture and the divisions within the local community and party bureaucracy. The script had originally been written eleven years earlier.

The fact that the new wave played a political role cannot be denied, but the films offer much more than a coded attack on the government. As Milan Kundera once said, the importance of the art of Central and Eastern Europe lies in the way in which it offers new testimony about mankind. To reduce this art to nothing more than politics would be to murder it, in the worst tradition of Stalinist dogmatists.[4]

The Stalinist bureaucrats who consolidated their power after the Soviet-led suppression of the Prague Spring did, of course, resort to such simplifications when judging what kinds of art should be produced and distributed. From 1969 onwards, well over a hundred feature films were banned. The reasons included unacceptability of both theme and style and, of course, directors and writers, principally those who were among the many who went into exile or had been banned from the industry. But while this is evidence of a determination to suppress dissent in all its forms (in effect, the liquidation of a culture), such

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repression tells us little about the political significance of the films at the time that they were made.

The striking feature is that the wave began in 1963, five years before the Prague Spring, and therefore occurred in parallel with the 1960s move towards the 'democratic socialism' associated with the Communist Party's Action Programme of April 1968. The Marxist philosopher Karel Kosík has made some important observations regarding the role culture played in political change. Arguing about the rejection of what he called 'concrete totality', he wrote that culture, and in particular cinema, revealed the ways in which life in such a manipulated world had become impossible. Thus issues first raised within creative culture were subsequently addressed by philosophers and social scientists.[5]

LITERARY SOURCES: MENZEL AND HRABAL

As well as the fiction of Kundera (*No Laughing Matter* and *The Joke*) and Josef Škvorecký (Schorm's *End of a Priest* (*Farářův konec*), 1968, and Menzel's *Crime in the Nightclub* (*Zločin v šantánu*), 1968), the work of a wide range of novelists proved to be important as source material. Perhaps the most influential of these was Bohumil Hrabal, whose novella provided the basis for Menzel's Oscar-winning comedy *Closely Observed Trains*, probably the most internationally acclaimed film of the entire wave. Hrabal's work, which began to be published in the mid-1960s, was characterised by its ironic approach to the idiosyncrasies of everyday life. Hrabal drew directly on his experiences as a railway dispatcher, brewery assistant and wastepaper destroyer – a variety of jobs to which, despite a degree in law, he found himself condemned by the Nazi occupation, and subsequently, by Communist disapproval of his 'negative' writings.

His work often took a 'stream of consciousness' form, incorporating a variety of avant-garde and surrealist elements within an overall realist framework. The collection of short stories *Pearls of the Deep* (*Perličky na dně*) inspired the new wave tribute of the same name, made in 1965, to which Chytilová, Jireš, Schorm, Němec and Menzel all contributed episodes. Two additional stories, brought to the screen by Passer and Herz, were separately released. Hrabal collaborated on the scripts and had walk-on parts in all the episodes.

Closely Observed Trains, made the following year, focuses on the story of a young apprentice at a provincial railway station during the Nazi occupation. At first, he is preoccupied with losing his virginity, a pursuit beside which the Nazis seem an unnecessary distraction. But he ends up losing his life planting a bomb on a Nazi munitions train. A film whose humour in many ways recalls the subversive model of Jaroslav Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*

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(*Dobrý voják Švejk*, 1921–23), Hrabal's vision is softened by Menzel's celebration of a range of stubbornly individualistic characters. The film is unconventional (the protagonist dies), but the authorities were more disturbed by its casual attitude to the wartime resistance movement and the depiction of a hero whose 'martyrdom' is almost independent of his own actions.

Menzel's and Hrabal's next comedy, *Skylarks on a String/Larks on a String* (*Skřivánci na niti*, 1969), was not released until 1990, when it won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. It deals with life at a steel mill in the 1950s, where members of the middle classes are undergoing re-education through forced labour. A film more explicitly focused on the group than *Closely Observed Trains*, it also examined the human individual in adversity. Its reference to one of the most shameful aspects of the political history of the 1950s was enough to ensure that it joined other 'subversive' films in the safe of the Barrandov studios.

The Slovak Wave

The Slovak wave, which boasted some of the most original 'art' movies of the 1960s, was scarcely given a chance to take off. Jakubisko's *Crucial Years* met criticism when it was completed, but *The Deserter and the Nomads* (*Zbehovia a pútnici*, 1968) was only allowed to be screened at foreign festivals, *Birds, Orphans, and Fools* (*Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni*, 1969) was not released until 1990 and *See You in Hell, Friends!* (*Dovidenia v pekle, priatelia!*, 1970), despite circulating earlier in an unauthorised version made available by its Italian co-producer, was not completed until 1990.

It is difficult to characterise Jakubisko's style but, alongside an admiration for such contemporary directors as Godard and Fellini, he deliberately drew on his roots in Eastern Slovakia. Strong elements of folk culture manifest themselves in his work, though he also deals quite explicitly with 'big' themes: apocalypse, war, 'liberations' by foreign powers and issues of Slovak identity. The films of his friend Elo Havetta (*Party in the Botanical Garden*, *Lilies of the Field* (*L'alie pol'né*), 1972) show similar folk influences, but he preserves his own distinctive approach. Dušan Hanák's bleak and modernist art movie, *322*, which ostensibly tells the story of a man suffering from cancer, provided a powerful allegory of contemporary social life. It was banned, together with his later, now classic, feature documentary, *Pictures of the Old World* (*Obrazy starého sveta*, 1972).

The Legacy of the Wave

There is no question that the Czechoslovak new wave constituted a significant film movement, being directed towards both cultural and social change. While

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few of the leading filmmakers were members of the Communist Party, their politically critical and artistically innovative work can be viewed as an important development in the revitalisation and reform of socialism rather than its destruction. It was *glasnost* twenty years before Gorbachev. Providing a powerful and arguably unique episode in film history, the Czech new wave lasted about seven years (much longer than the movement's French and British counterparts) and played a more crucial, active role in social transformation. Suppressed by the post-invasion government, the new wave became a model for what could be achieved in filmmaking, and, for its former participants, it soon came to signify a lost golden age.

The established new wave directors were unable to regain the pre-eminence they had once enjoyed after the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989[6] and, for many, after years of struggle with bureaucracy, a continued struggle to make films compromised by market pressures cannot have provided a very attractive option. Some of the directors have died (Jireš, Schorm, Juráček, Máša, Vláčil, Kachyňa, Kádar and Klos, Sirový), while others have remained abroad (Forman, Passer, Jasný). Menzel has opted to concentrate on theatre production. But others, such as Chytilová, Němec, Bočan, Vachek and Vihanová, remain active. Low-budget films such as Chytilová's documentary *Flights and Falls* (*Vzlety a pády*, 2000) and Němec's digitally-shot personal essay *Late Night Talks with Mother* (*Noční hovory s matkou*, 2001) reveal the world of what might have been.

The Czech new wave continues to exert great influence as a tradition and, while some younger directors quite naturally wish to forge their own paths, it makes its presence felt in such films as Jan Svěrák's Oscar-winning *Kolya* and Jan Hřebejk's Oscar-nominated *Divided We Fall* (*Musíme si pomáhat*, 2000), the low-key studies of Alice Nellis (*Eeny Meeny* (*Ene bene*), 2000, *Some Secrets* (*Výlet*), 2002) and the methodical works of Saša Gedeon (*Indian Summer* (*Indiánské léto*), 1995; *Return of the Idiot/The Idiot Returns* (*Návrat idiota*), 1999). These influences come primarily from Forman, Passer, and Menzel. Many of the younger filmmakers admit to an admiration for these directors, but it is less a matter of conscious homage than the inheritance of a similar world-view, of senses and perceptions.

Internationally, the influences are less obvious, although the references to *Closely Observed Trains* in Kieślowski's Polish film *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979) and to *A Blonde in Love* in Pál Erdőss's Hungarian *The Princess* (*Adk király katonát*, 1982) are clearly not fortuitous. British director Ken Loach is a great admirer of Forman, Passer and Menzel – and, in particular, of the film *A Blonde in Love*. He once wrote: 'It made a great impression on me when it first came out; its shrewd perceptiveness, irony, warmth. It allowed characters time to reveal themselves'.[7] The influences on Loach are apparent in a number of his films but a number of other British pictures reveal a similar flavour (such

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as *Gregory's Girl*, 1981; *A Private Function*, 1984; *Brassed Off*, 1996). In some cases, there is a direct connection. Cinematographer Miroslav Ondříček (who worked with Němec and Forman) also shot three Lindsay Anderson films: *The White Bus* (1967), *If. . .* (1968), and *O Lucky Man!* (1973). The Czechoslovak new wave also had an impact outside of Europe, and includes many Asian directors among its admirers. Moreover, Forman and Passer brought a Czech flavour to their American films (*Taking Off*, 1971; *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 1975; and others).

But it is perhaps less a conscious working within a tradition that is important for contemporary Czech filmmakers than the bare *fact* of that tradition. The new wave indicated not merely what could be achieved, but also the role that cinema might play in society and culture. In a market of only ten million (less than the size of Greater London), filmmakers could easily be tempted to give up and submit to the global dominance of English-language cinema. Surprisingly, in the period 1991–2001, seven of the top ten best-attended films in the Czech Republic were Czech. Czech film culture is demonstrably strong, and it also indicates what can be achieved on shoestring budgets. Many of the films also show how to conduct a dialogue with an audience and address serious subjects in an accessible form. The cinemas of small nations will perhaps make a mark on the New Europe and, as the Hungarian director István Szabó has put it, give expression to the variety without which people will otherwise lose their identity and culture.[8]

NOTES

1. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).
2. Herbert Eagle, 'Andrzej Wajda: Film Language and the Artist's Truth', in Ladislav Matějka and Benjamin Stolz (eds), *Cross Currents 1: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1982), p. 339.
3. Herbert Eagle, 'Dadaism and Structuralism in Chytilová's *Daisies*', in Ladislav Matějka (ed.), *Cross Currents 10: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 225.
4. Milan Kundera, interviewed by George Theiner, *The Guardian* (London), 12 October 1977, p. 10.
5. Karel Kosík, interviewed in Antonín J. Liehm, *The Politics of Culture*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Grove Press, 1973).
6. On 17 November 1989, an anti-regime march led to the subsequent collapse of the Communist government and the forming of a government with a Communist minority role on 10 December. Václav Havel, who had been in jail two months previously, was elected President on 29 December. The peaceful transference of power became known as the 'Velvet Revolution'.
7. Ken Loach, quoted on the video cover of *A Blonde in Love* (London: Connoisseur Video, 1993).
8. István Szabó, unpublished interview by Peter Hames (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1999).

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Recommended films

All My Good Countrymen (*Všichni dobří rodáci*, Vojtěch Jasný, 1968)
Closely Observed Trains/Closely Watched Trains (*Ostře sledované vlaky*, Jiří Menzel, 1966)
Daisies (*Sedmikrásky*, Věra Chytilová, 1966)
Diamonds of the Night (*Démanty noci*, Jan Němec, 1964)
The Firemen's Ball (*Hoří, má panenko*, Miloš Forman, 1967)
Intimate Lighting (*Intimní osvětlení*, Ivan Passer, 1966)
The Joke (*Žert*, Jaromil Jireš, 1969)
A Blonde in Love/Loves of a Blonde (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky*, Miloš Forman, 1965)
The Party and the Guest/A Report on the Party and the Guests (*O slavnosti a hostech*, Jan Němec, 1966)
A Shop on the High Street/The Shop on Main Street (*Obchod na korze*, Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, 1965)

Recommended readings

Biró, Yvette (1983) 'Pathos and Irony in East European Films', in David W. Paul (ed.), *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*. London: Macmillan.
Eagle, Herbert (1991) 'Dada and Structuralism in Chytilová's *Daisies*', in *Crosscurrents 10: A Yearbook of Central European Culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, pp. 223–34.
Forman, Miloš, and Jan Novák (1994) *Turnaround: A Memoir*. New York: Villard Books, London: Faber.
Hames, Peter (1994) 'Forman', in Daniel J. Goulding (ed.), *Five Filmmakers: Tarkovsky, Forman, Polanski, Szabó, Makavejev*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 50–91.
Hames, Peter (2000) '*The Good Soldier Švejk* and After: The Comic Tradition in Czech Film', in Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (eds), *100 Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?* Manchester: Manchester University Press/New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 64–76.
Hames, Peter (ed.) (2004) *The Cinema of Central Europe*. London and New York: Wallflower Press.
Hames, Peter (2005) *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 2nd edn. London and New York: Wallflower Press.
Iordanova, Dina (2003) *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*. London and New York: Wallflower Press.
Liehm, Antonín J. (1974) *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience*. New York: International Arts and Sciences Press.
Liehm, Antonín J. (1975) *The Miloš Forman Stories*, trans. Jeanne Němcová. New York: International Arts and Sciences Press.
Liehm, Antonín J. (1983) 'Miloš Forman: the Style and the Man', in David W. Paul (ed.), *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*. London: Macmillan.
Škvorecký, Josef (1971) *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of the Czech Cinema*, trans. Michael Schonberg. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates.
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