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**TAKING THE NEW WAVE OUT OF ISOLATION: HUMOUR AND TRAGEDY OF
THE CZECHOSLOVAK NEW WAVE AND POST-COMMUNIST CZECH CINEMA**

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INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The cultural phenomenon often labelled the Czechoslovak New Wave, in which avant-garde, subversive films appeared under the Communist regime until the Prague Spring of 1968 ended after the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion, has been addressed in depth in Western scholarship over the decades.¹ Peter Hames, for one, has also paid significant attention to post-Communism Czech cinema.² Much of this work focuses on the New Wave in isolation, existing in spite of the regime; indeed, I will also engage with the question of how the New Wave was able to occur under Communism. In this thesis, however, this question will be taken out of isolation by comparing the New Wave with film production from varying eras of Czech cinema, examining what appeared before the New Wave and, in particular, the films which have materialised after 1989.

This research is of a comparative nature, thus the decision to include post-Communist films in this study is motivated by a desire to examine how a literary strand from the Communist era prevails in the 'new'. Another facet of this comparative study is in my dealing with predominantly French post-structuralist theory. In all of this, I will be dealing

¹ See Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), where Hames discusses the origins of the New Wave and films by prominent directors such as Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Věra Chytilová, Jan Němec and Ivan Passer. Hames is concerned with the contemporary politics of the time in relation to film production, and considers production issues relating to the state, studios, external funding and the relationships between individuals and groups working in the industry; Jonathan L. Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), in which Owen considers the New Wave as part of a trend for surrealism in the 1960s, focusing again on key New Wave directors; Anikó Imre (ed.), *A Companion to Eastern European Cinema* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), which includes Polish and Yugoslav as well as Czechoslovak cinema, integrating the issues of east/west overlap; Robert Buchar (ed.), *Czech New Wave Filmmakers in Interviews* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), which is introduced by A.J. Llehm and provides transcripts of a series of interviews with key Czechoslovak filmmakers, especially but not exclusively from the New Wave.

² In Catherine Portuges and Peter Hames (eds.), *Cinemas in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe After 1989* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013); see also Leen Engelen and Kris van Heuckelom (eds.), *European Cinema After the Wall: Screen East-West Mobility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Jan Čulík, *A Society in Distress: The Image of the Czech Republic in Contemporary Czech Feature Film* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2013)

with texts in English translation. One underpinning concept I will address in this is that of Derridean *différance*. Keeping this concept in mind (which will be explained in detail in this introduction), there is a positive effect of interpretation through translation via a proliferation of meaning on this subject in a target language.³ As with the various titles of Jiří Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains* (*Ostře sledované vlaky*, 1966) in English translation (*A Close Watch on the Trains*, *Closely Watched Trains* – a film studied at length here) the different translations offer different interpretations in the target language, generating greater depth of meaning through *différance*.

My main research questions are to do with the comparison between different eras of Czechoslovak and Czech society, interrogating to what extent Czech culture continues a strand of subversion through humour in the face of various and often conflicting overarching political narratives during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A prominent question explored here is: to what extent does any socio-political system generate oppression regardless of the overarching political narrative? And confusion over who is to blame abounds. A question which leads on from this is: to what extent does subversion from within the system actually help to uphold the status quo?

While the production of subversive films under the Nazi and Communist regimes suggests scrutiny of the oppressive, overarching system, my inclusion of post-Communist and pre-Nazi film analyses is an attempt to demonstrate how Czech culture has a tradition of subversion against overarching socio-political conditions, regardless of the ideological banner. Using the feminist doctrine of *écriture féminine* presented by Hélène Cixous in her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975) (which will be explored in more depth in this

³ Susan Bassnett has written at length on the implications of translation in *Translation Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2014); however, unlike this study, not in relation to Derrida. For Bassnett, 'assessment is culture bound' (Bassnett, 2014: 21), which is a challenge to how 'neither its importance nor its difficulty has been grasped' (Bassnett, 2014: 15). Bassnett considers 'transference' in translation as opposed to 'implantation' of meaning (Bassnett, 2014: 18), which allows for a proliferation of interpretation and meaning which is otherwise closed off from the culture of a source language.

introduction), another question proposed by how these films communicate with their wider socio-political environment is: do they achieve the goal of destroying the overarching system, or do they merely serve as disruptions to the status quo?

With the focus on humour as a defence against tragic circumstances, and my argument that it is the main weapon deployed by Czechoslovak filmmakers, this question will be aimed at the darkly-comic trope of Czech culture, querying: how effective is laughing in the face of adversity in combating oppression?

I will explore these questions while considering the double-epithet ‘darkly-comic’ in its relationship with Derridean *différance*, due to its apparently oxymoronic nature. The effect of something being dark and comic at the same time reflects the uncanny, which can mean both homely and unhomely at the same time. Derrida relates the uncanny to Marxism in his work *Specters of Marx*, where he argues that:

The specter that Marx was talking about, then, communism, was there without being there. It was not yet there. It will never be there. There is no *Dasein*, but there is no *Dasein* without uncanniness, without the strange familiarity (*Unheimlichkeit*) of some specter. What is a specter? What is its history and what is its time? (Derrida, 1994: 121)

Here, Derrida entwines Marxism and communism into ideas of history and time, insisting that neither concept is tangible or non-existent. In doing so, he links these concepts with Sigmund Freud’s uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*), where the German *Unheimliche* invoked by Derrida can mean both homely and unhomely at the same time, again suggesting *différance*. Part of the uncanny is the feeling of being ill-at-ease in one’s own body, or unhomely at home, and this echoes the haunting feeling Derrida proposes; like *différance*, the meaning of the word ‘uncanny’ is what defers its meaning, and in turn generates a sense of what it is – a haunting experience in one’s own home. One of the key questions explored here is to what extent Czechoslovak culture of the twentieth century and beyond demonstrates an overlap between the oppressed and their oppressors, which generates questions over

homeliness and unhomeliness. My argument will consider the Derridean concept of phallogocentrism,⁴ and by taking the New Wave out of isolation I will be able to present an argument that Czech culture has a tradition of subversion under phallogocentrism which applies to the several socio-political environments which existed in the twentieth century, not just the 1960s and the New Wave. My discussions on New Wave films such as *Closely Observed Trains*, Miloš Forman's *The Firemen's Ball* (*Hoří, má panenko*, 1967) and Jan Němec's *A Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*, 1966) in my first chapter will be my contribution on the New Wave, but will consider the wider implications of Czech culture throughout the century and beyond as a platform for the proceeding chapters. In my second chapter I will examine Juraj Herz's *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1969) as a film produced on the hinge of the Prague Spring and the period of Normalization, which self-reflexively highlights this theme of cultural overlap. This will then carry into Karel Kachyňa's *The Ear* (*Ucho*, 1970) which, whilst belonging to the next decade, retains a strong 'New-Wave' feel, and is ironically the most directly critical of the regime of the films selected despite being produced during the Normalization period.

One focus of these discussions is to consider the role of Czech characters in these films: whether they are mere puppets whose strings are pulled by large, impersonal forces outwith their control, or whether questions of grotesque overlap suggest the line between oppressor/oppressed is blurrier than that. For Hames, 'ultimately it is people who help to create the system of which they are supposedly the victims' (Hames, 2004: 142). Antonín Jaroslav Liehm agrees that a crisis facing modern Czechs is in facing up to the reality that they were complicit in the edification of oppressive ideologies thrust upon them by forces outwith their control during the twentieth century:

⁴ Phallogocentrism is the Derridean concept where there is a 'production of intelligible experience through exclusive categories which privilege the siting of a masculinised perspective' (Feder, Rawlinson & Zakin, 1977: 47)

only two thousand out of fifteen million people in the nation publicly stood up in opposition [to the Communist regime] . . . A few artists . . . put this mirror in the way of a very small fragment of Czech reality called film. Their statements reflect an image of us, regardless of how and where we were living. Even more interesting is how all of this stretches into the ‘post-communist’ era (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2).

In my third chapter I will contribute to this discussion of how all of this grotesque overlap between oppressed and oppressor stretches into the post-Communist era by examining Tomáš Vorel’s *Smoke* (*Kouř*, 1991), Vladimír Morávek’s *Bored in Brno* (*Nuda v Brně*, 2003) and Vladimír Michálek’s *Of Parents and Children* (*O rodičích a dětech*, 2008) to explore how the prevalent concerns of the twentieth century continue to impact on Czech culture, and how the accepted contemporary ‘new wave’ of democracy carries with it its own nuances the films’ characters have to negotiate.

Jean Baudrillard has alluded to these similarities between modern, Western societies and the regimes I will discuss in this introduction:

All the material machinery of communication and professional activity, and the permanent *festive celebration* of objects in advertising with the hundreds of *daily mass* media messages; from the proliferation of somewhat obsessional objects to the symbolic psychodrama which fuels the nocturnal objects that come to *haunt* us even in our dreams [my emphasis] (Baudrillard quoted in Poster, 2001: 32).

I will demonstrate how the religious rhetoric deployed by Baudrillard here helps to emphasise the relevance of the comparison between the New Wave and post-Communism films in terms of how they interact with phallogocentrism. This ‘proliferation of somewhat obsessional objects’ is felt in the New Wave films where the bourgeois aesthetic remains intact, but is especially prevalent in the post-Communism films where Czech culture has *bought in* to these types of ‘mass media messages’ with a kind of religious devotion: radios, TVs, posters, advertising are everywhere in *Bored in Brno*, for instance. I will question what devices allow for this offensive in Czech culture against oppressive forces such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Nazism, Communism, and even post-Communist consumerism,

especially in its dealing with the comic.⁵ This theme of comedies which defy their environment is one I will return to in this introduction and throughout this thesis, which will examine the role of humour in Czechoslovak and Czech cinema.

CROSSING OVER: ART FILMS THAT COULD REACH THE WHOLE WORLD

In discussing East-West mobility in Czech cinema after the fall of Communism, Petra Hanáková points to the emphasis on the family home in the New Wave as a symbol of stasis, an inability to move which the closing of borders caused, bringing self-reflexive comedy closer to the audience (Hanáková in Engelen & Van Heuckelom, 2014: 113-124). Hanáková, however, fails to connect this tightening of borders to the crumbling of so-called borders within these family homes: the breaking-up of the nuclear family (as demonstrated in *The Cremator* and in the post-1989 film *Bored in Brno*), the threat of invasion from foreign forces and ideologies (deeply felt in *The Cremator*), and the threat of the invasive authorities in the home (as in *The Ear*) which in their ability to divide characters generates some of the comedy in the films. This disjoint between strict borders and borders in a state of flux helps to generate a comic effect via its play on the grotesque, something I will discuss in relation to these films.

The allusion to a comic strand spanning different eras in Czech culture is part of an overall project of this thesis to highlight the limitations of considering the New Wave as an isolated occurrence. A.J. Liehm (born 1924) outlines a characteristic of Czechoslovak filmmakers of the 1960s, arguing that they ‘wanted to do more than make entertainment films for a small local market . . . they wanted to make art films that could reach the whole world’ (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 1). Treatment of the New Wave as an isolated period in which filmmakers made an unprecedented challenge to existing conditions is a myth I intend to

⁵ Robert Porter points to this Czech literary tradition of the comic in *An Introduction to Twentieth-Century Czech Fiction: Comedies of Defiance* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001)

avoid by demonstrating how it was in fact another instance of subverting the phallogocentric status quo as part of a Czech cultural tradition. Indeed, elsewhere, A.J. Liehm in conjunction with Mira Liehm, outlines the history of Czechoslovak film which in the 1920s embraced Western (particularly French) cinema (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 21-22), pointing to a 'manifesto' written by 'members of the Czech avant-garde in 1922' which read: "How happy we will be to allow ourselves to be touched by astonishing stories and films, because they all touch on the nerve of our intellect" (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 23). Thus, despite arguing that the New Wave demonstrated a preference for 'art films' over 'entertainment films', A.J. Liehm and M. Liehm here argue that from as early as the 1920s the 'Czech avant-garde' had the goal of 'touching intellect'. The barrier to this goal during the 1920s Liehm and Liehm present is again significant when considering the changes in the socio-political environment after the fall of Communism: 'For the first time, Czech businessmen [in the 1920s] felt like real masters in their native land . . . Film seemed to be a promising source of profits' (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 23). Despite the early embracing of Western cinema, and the avant-garde manifesto of 1922, the gearing towards commercial profit presents a problem for Liehm and Liehm, with the move away from an outward-looking cultural project to 'an increasing provincialism, oriented more and more solely to domestic viewers' desire for cheap entertainment' (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 23).

This prevalence of 'entertainment' over 'art' under commercial-oriented conditions is a problem picked up by Saša Gedeon (b. 1970) in relation to post-1989 Czech cinema:

The New Wave was united by opposition against the regime, against its ideology and esthetics. The situation today is so fragmented . . . the new generation of filmmakers is actually a bunch of isolated individualists. One wants to make commercial films, the other comedies or drama, somebody wants to be sarcastic . . . Actually, I would say they see filmmaking as a playground (Gedeon in Buchar, 2004: 31-2).

Gedeon, while highlighting differences between the two periods, also underlines a preference for 'art film' over 'entertainment film' which unites them, and laments the

necessity under contemporary conditions to succumb to commercial pressure. This compromise is comparable with the subversive compromise made on behalf of New Wave filmmakers, who could not directly oppose the regime, a frustration outlined by influential New Wave director Forman when he describes how his controversial film *The Firemen's Ball* managed to avoid the wrath of the censors despite its allegorical link between the fumbling firemen and the Communist authorities. When asked whether he realised the film was becoming a political metaphor, Forman replied:

The Communists teach you that everything is political . . . so we are aware of it, of course, and try to hide it as best as possible. I was lucky because they would go, 'It's only a comedy, nothing serious'. First you learn to read between the lines and then you write between the lines (Forman in Pawlikowski, 1990).

Forman demonstrates an awareness of the political potency of his contribution to the New Wave and outlines pleading ignorance, of trying to 'hide it', as a tactic of the filmmakers. I will argue that the prevalence of the comic in the New Wave underlines a precedent set previously in both Czech film and literary traditions on how to circumvent fluctuating socio-political environments, providing the New Wave filmmakers with a tool to navigate their environment. In examining this Czech literary and cinematic strand I will generate my argument that despite Gedeon's lament over the disconnection between the New Wave and the present day, Czech films after the fall of Communism produce this theme of dissidence towards the prevailing culture of the time. The purpose of this comparison between the New Wave and post-1989 Czech cinema will be to demonstrate how rather than treating the New Wave as an isolated period of protest against the Communist regime, it should be taken as an episode within an existing Czech cultural tradition of subversion towards phallogocentric modes and systems.

I will present a parallel between this type of opposition to phallogocentric modes and Cixous's *écriture féminine*, questioning whether attempts to subvert the status quo in phallogocentric culture are beneficial to the oppressed of that culture, or whether they merely

play a part in continuing their own oppression; whether by engaging with phallogocentric cultures, subversion from within still has the effect of edifying its structures – the oppressed become the oppressors.

This disseminating of meaning overlaps with the de-historicising of the Kafkaesque, something Milan Kundera attests is because ‘Czechs have not usually identified themselves with history or thought that its events are serious or intelligible’ (Kundera, 1985: 91). This statement is something of a joke when made in the twentieth century, where history was having an indelible impact on Czechs; yet the joke here points to the overarching narrative of ‘history’ and its phallogocentric deficiencies – every ‘new wave’ under phallogocentrism carries with it the residue of ‘old’ and when received in the ‘new’ is bound towards its own cyclical ‘exhaustion’ and ‘resurrection’ through dissemination, such is male desire – the purpose of which Baudrillard alludes to: reproduction. Much as the fulfilment of male sexual desire carries with it the genes which are passed onto the next generation in conception, ‘new waves’ within phallogocentric culture carry with them the genes of ‘old’.

SUBVERSIVE STRAND

In order to approach the questions outlined above comprehensively, I will take the New Wave out of isolation and consider Czechoslovak and Czech film before the 1960s in this introduction, entering the New Wave in the first chapter, films which hinge the New Wave and the period of Normalization in the second chapter, and in the third chapter films appearing after the fall of Communism.

Two filmmakers I will discuss in reference to films preceding the New Wave are Martin Frič (1902-1968), a prolific director, writer and actor, and Otakar Vávra (1911-2011), also a prolific director and writer. Both managed to operate under the Nazi and Communist regimes, with Frič a proponent largely of comedies such as *Life is a Dog* (*Život je pes*, 1933)

and *Hard Life of an Adventurer* (*Těžký život dobrodruha*, 1941), although these comedies contain the backdrop of the Great Depression and Nazism respectively, while Vávra often preferred historical/period drama such as *Jan Hus* (1954) and *Witchhammer* (*Kladivo na čarodějnice*, 1969).

The distance from the seriousness of contemporary issues these genre choices offer is a significant theme in addressing the question of how the New Wave was allowed to occur under the Communist regime. Forman's description of how *The Firemen's Ball* managed to avoid the wrath of the censors (in the comedy genre's not being taken seriously) reinforces the precedent set by Frič on how to circumvent fluctuating socio-political environments, providing the New Wave filmmakers with a tool to navigate their environment; the influence of Vávra, meanwhile, is indisputable. Vávra was professor of film studies at the Academy of Performing Arts (*Filmová fakulta Akademie múzických umění*, FAMU) at Charles University in Prague, when key New Wave directors Forman, Menzel, Věra Chytilová, Němec and Ivan Passer were studying there.

Vávra worked under every regime in Czechoslovakia from the 1930s until the fall of Communism in 1989, leading to questions over his integrity as a filmmaker.⁶ While the debate over Vávra's own self-interest in the face of socio-political upheaval remains contentious, Antonín Kachlík (b. 1923), a FAMU colleague of Vávra's during the period of Normalization, argues that 'Vávra was a party member; so was I. Yes, I suppose filmmaking *was* in the hands of the party members' (Kachlík in Pawlikowski, 1990). However, to take this as meaning that Vávra was simply an apologist for the Communist regime would be missing the point. While Vávra's *Witchhammer* depicts a seventeenth-century Inquisition theme and is thus removed from contemporary politics, the allegory for 1950s Stalinist show

⁶ When asked about criticism aimed at him for working through 'all regimes', Vávra responded: 'Making films is my life. I was shooting films through all regimes, but I saved my face' (Vávra in Buchar, 2004: 123).

trials is prevalent. Vávra circumvents censorship via his preferred historical narrative genre, yet produces a biting political critique.

Yet this model of subversion is not fully satisfactory. Cixous's *écriture féminine* strategy of obliteration through disruption, and its insufficiencies, is outlined in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', which opens with the statement 'I shall speak' (Cixous, 2010: 166). This deployment of the performative is at odds with Roland Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967), in which he argues that 'it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is . . . to reach that point where only language acts, "performs", and not "me"' (Barthes, 1977: 143). Cixous, in this statement, is thus causing disruption to this methodology, which is self-reflexively outlined in the disjoint between her performative statement, that she 'shall speak', and the act of writing. For Cixous:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal (Cixous in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2010: 161).

Substituting the feminine here for the oppressed under phallogocentrism, the need to subvert from within generates problems. Indeed, Vávra acknowledges that his film *Witchhammer* was a 'historical paraphrase' of the 'political monster' process of the 1950s show trials, but he 'denied any similarities, insisting that [he] just made another historical film' (Vávra in Buchar, 2004: 119). I will later demonstrate how this genre was preferred by the Communist authorities, which adds further nuance to its selection.

This genre choice reflects Forman's in relation to the perception of *The Firemen's Ball*, playing on conventions within the film industry under Normalization, and reflects Frič's play on comedy under the Nazi regime in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* (a film I will discuss in detail in this introduction). Ewa Mazierska cites Josef Kroutvor as describing literature as being regarded by Czechs as 'their main weapon against foreign invasion, taking the place of

conventional politics' (Mazierska, 2008: 10). She then describes the 'dove-like' Czech hero, as embodied in characters such as Švejk and Father Kondelík, as 'phlegmatic and passive' (Mazierska, 2008: 13). This summation of Švejk as 'dove-like', 'phlegmatic and passive' is an oversight by Mazierska.⁷ Like Švejk, the juxtaposition of apparent passivity and an ability to navigate the oppressive socio-political conditions reflects the actions of Vávra and Forman, who pleaded ignorance to their political intentions. Mazierska then quotes František Daniel as claiming that 'to ridicule something, the ironic writer uses characters who . . . are seemingly dumb – but only seemingly . . . who can effectively ridicule those who pretend to be powerful, those who pretend to be wise and pretend to have all the answers' (Daniel in Mazierska, 2008: 27). This reiterates the idea of a strand of subversion existing in Czech culture which is an adaptive mode of dealing with oppressive forces.

TROMPE L'LOEIL AND THE DARKLY COMIC

One tool providing this ability to adapt is brought out in the double-epithet 'darkly-comic', often used to describe films of the New Wave,⁸ and this juxtaposition of humour and something sinister does not necessarily point to any light-heartedness surrounding the films produced during this period. The same can be said for other periods, however, as in Frič's *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, where the protagonist finds himself embroiled in a conspiracy plot led by the unnamed despotic authorities, or Frič's earlier comic work *Life is a Dog*, which while created under the democratic Czechoslovak republic remains a comedy set in the face of the global financial crisis in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, linking the theme of comedies with serious backdrops.

⁷ As Jan Čulík argues, Švejk 'chooses to play games for his own amusement and the amusement of those around him. The games are primarily verbal, but he also play-acts, especially in the company of superiors. By game-playing, he is able to negate the destructive, bureaucratic machinery, overwhelming it with exuberant and unputdownable vitality' (Čulík, 1999)

⁸ See Peter Hames' description of 'comedies with an edge' on page 21 (Hames, 2004: 117)

Hard Life of an Adventurer has an anti-establishment tone which chimes with the New Wave in its depiction of an anti-hero, Crispin, dealing with his double-agent protagonist Fred Flok coming to life as part of a narratorial conspiracy led by the unnamed authorities. What motivates Crispin to accept his new situation, the overtly fictional narrative presented to him, is his own increased access to power, wealth and status, and in turn his love interest. He is distracted from the linearity of the rational narrative by seduction within a completely irrational narrative. For Baudrillard, simulation is ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal’ (Baudrillard, 1994: 1) – these appearances are what Crispin accepts as he ends up trapped by the authorities and confronted over his actions.

The twist at the conclusion of *Hard Life of an Adventurer* mimics the trope of the type of detective fiction Crispin is writing, deepening the film’s self-reflexivity. This is what makes the film’s passing Nazi censorship understandable: firstly, in its de-specifying effect of not naming the authorities; and secondly, with the outcome: that the authorities set the whole thing up, and the didactic message passed, down that Crispin’s novels are encouraging others to behave like him, acts as an invitation to think twice about what stories are told, a message that the New Wave filmmakers had to keep in mind in order to work under (however less stringent) censorship laws. This message suits the object of Nazi censorship, which is to defuse dissidence; in not specifying the authorities, it also suits the Communist regime in the same way, since the same rules apply for any totalitarian regime. The film’s conclusion develops the self-reflexivity in relation to propagandist messages of the time: while the film exposes through self-reflexivity the poverty of Nazi propaganda, the didactic message is retained. For Baudrillard, the *message* is thus the ‘*trompe l’oeil*’,⁹ which is ‘the enchanted simulation: more false than false, and the secret of appearances’ (Baudrillard, 1994: 157).

⁹ *Trompe l’oeil* translates from the French as ‘trick of the eye’ and as Nicholas Wade suggests, ‘all pictures trick the eye, but some in more contrived ways than others.’ (Wade, 2016: 47). Wade devotes a chapter of *Art and Illusionists* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016) to the device of *trompe l’oeil* in art.

This feature of Baudrillardian seduction is part of what makes film an ideal arena, or ‘site of play’, for the kind of study being performed here, where with:

[...] no fables, no narrative, no compositions. No scenes, no theatre, no action. The *trompe l’oeil* forgets all this and parodies its theatricality: which is why they are scattered, juxtaposed in the randomness of their appearance . . . (Baudrillard, 1994: 157)

By ‘forgetting’ its status within film the *trompe l’oeil*’s parodying of theatricality overlooks its own theatricality in a manner which overlaps ‘real’ and ‘fiction’ within metafiction, where narrative tells us something about the narrative process itself. Baudrillard continues that *trompe l’oeil*:

describes the void and absence found in every representational hierarchy which organises the elements of a painting, as it does the political realm . . . This seduction is not an aesthetic one, that of a painting and of a likeness, but an acute and metaphysical seduction, one derived from the nullification of the real (Baudrillard, 1994: 157)

Again, Baudrillard draws the connection between art and the ‘political realm’ in relation to *trompe l’oeil*, arguing that seduction derives from the ‘nullification of the real’. This is what occurs in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*: Crispin accepts this ‘metaphysical seduction’, since the ‘real’ he is willing to accept is based on an absolute fiction, that of his own fictional character, in the ‘real’. That this is presented in mise en abyme as part of an overtly fictional narrative – on one level by the unnamed authorities in the film, and on another as the film itself, produced in both cases by a hierarchy of cast and crew/double-agents, production company/unnamed authorities – elevates this ‘void and absence found in every representational hierarchy’. Crispin is left in no doubt that the authorities were on to him all along and this revelation will conceivably alter his behaviour in future to play by the rules.

The *trompe-l’oeil* effect of mise en abyme in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* deflects the focus from the authorities in a manner which helps to keep their authority intact, much like the linguistic effect of *différance*. For Jacques Derrida:

the verb to differ [*différer*] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until ‘later’ what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible (Derrida quoted in Kearney & Rainwater, 1996: 441).

The double-epithet darkly-comic is affected by *différance* in that ‘dark’ is opposed to ‘comic’, yet this opposition helps to generate an understanding of what ‘darkly-comic’ is. For Immanuel Kant, ‘laughter is an affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing’ (Kant quoted in Bennett & Royle, 2004: 95-6), while for Thomas Hobbes, laughter is ‘nothing else but *sudden glory* arising from some sudden *conception* of some *eminency* in ourselves, by *comparison* with the *infirmity* of others, or with our own formerly’ (Hobbes quoted in Bennett & Royle, 2004: 95-6). Edward Berry points to ‘theorist of laughter’ Henri Bergson as justifying the former:

[...] as a form of social correction. By experiencing the humiliation of being laughed at, so the idea goes, the victim is led to recognize his or her social deviance and rejoins the community reformed. In this way, even satirical laughter can become carnivalesque (Bergson quoted by Berry in Leggatt: 123).

These are somewhat limiting definitions of laughter, since the nature of laughter is so notoriously difficult to determine. Bergson introduces his work *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* with the question: ‘What does laughter mean?’ (Bergson, 1999: 7). Bergson insists that laughter ‘must have a *social* signification’ (Bergson, 1999: 13), which corroborates the Hobbesian approach; while elsewhere he relates it to the Kantian laughter at the ‘infirmity of others’ in how laughing at non-human objects, such as an animal or a hat, involves laughing at the ‘resemblance to man’ or the ‘shape that men have given to it’ (Bergson, 1999: 9). As the examples suggest, laughter means different things to different observers, while all point to the condition in its association with the negative: it is the absence of the expected fulfilment of the scene which generates humour for Kant, while it is the negative of the self or others, what others lack or what we lacked previously, for Hobbes, and for Bergson it is a missing human quality which can be transplanted. The deployment of the

darkly comic in the face of dire circumstances thus has the potential for a corrective, social function as Bergson and Hobbes suggest – that in taking these individual situations as symbols of the collective situation, the laughter produced can alter society's behaviour away from its laughable, or pitiful, projections, which is invoked in the term 'carnavalesque'. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses a 'truly spring-like carnivalesque' (Bakhtin, 1984: 146), where the 'debasement' comes from the 'material bodily lower stratum, the zone of the genital organs', but argues that 'such debasing gestures and expressions are ambivalent, since the lower stratum is not only a bodily grave but also . . . the fertilizing and generating stratum' (Bakhtin, 1984: 148). This 'spring-like carnivalesque' is represented in the Czech New Wave, which culminated in the Prague Spring, where the overlap between the comic and the tragic, laughter and death is prevalent. Perhaps this is nowhere presented better than in Herz's *The Cremator*, produced on the hinge of the Prague Spring and Normalization, where the tension between the comic and tragic is so intense. The anti-hero, Karel Kopfrkingl, works at a crematorium where his actions and pronouncements come across as comical. On the one hand he purports to have a virtuous professional nature which is at the mercy of the external political situation at the same time as pursuing his own personal gain from the changing political landscape. On the other hand, he purports to have a virtuous family-oriented life at the same time as being preoccupied with blood tests, which it is later revealed are the result of an anxiety caused by his use of prostitutes, a kind of joke whose debasement is aimed at the lower stratum. Kopfrkingl's choices after the Nazi invasion are all geared at his own self-promotion and his over-emphasised carrying out of the Aryan doctrine results in the destruction of his own family, which borders on farce. Again, this is part of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque:

When death and birth are shown in their comic aspect, scatological images in various forms almost always accompany the gay monsters created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated. (Bakhtin, 1984: 151)

Thus, the laughter produced in the face of the hideous acts by the ‘gay monster’ Kopfrkingl acts as a means of defeating the terror of the oppressive forces at play. Farce has a role in this through these ‘scatological images’ by playing on negations of expectation. This is brought out in Frič’s protagonist in *Life is a Dog* having to double and double again in conversation with his employer to keep up the pretence that both he and his alter-ego coexist, producing the ‘hysterical effect of a potentially permanent postponement of a resolution’ (Bennett & Royle, 2004: 95). Yet this episode, like the more sinister one in *The Cremator*, demonstrates a level of cunning, with characters dealing with forces outwith their control. By doubling in the face of dire circumstances and producing the effect of humour, they are able to circumnavigate their oppressive environment for their own personal benefit. This is the point which seems to be lost on Mazierska in relation to the Good Soldier Švejk: by doubling as the fool and generating humour, Švejk is able to circumnavigate his oppressive environment whilst showing up the idiocy of others supposedly in control.

However, while film production changed in Czechoslovakia after the Communist takeover, the nationalization of the film industry had begun before 1948. Jiří Knapík argues that the Communist regime ‘always regarded the cinema as an exceptionally important part of the cultural sphere that possessed great potential to influence society and introduce ideas about the nature of the socialist art – hence the KSČ’s interventions in film management prior to February 1948’ (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 47). While I will demonstrate that the deployment of settings ‘elsewhere’ and the use of the comedy genre were deflection techniques used by filmmakers to avoid censorship under the Communist regime, it is also important to note where developments in film production contributed to the development of this kind of subversive filmmaking from within a stringent system, especially in the 1960s, in Czechoslovakia.

Karl and Skopal argue that while the Communists were always aware of the potential for film to influence society, ‘there was no systematic, successful Sovietization of the film industry or cinema culture’, yet there was a ‘demand to follow the organisational principles’ as ‘various industry reorganizations according to the soviet model in the early 1950s demonstrate’ (Karl & Skopal, 2015: 5). This is a point Knapík later expands upon, when he describes how the KSČ became the ‘leading architect and propagator’ of the call for a ‘democratization of culture’ after 1945, whose ‘primary goals’ were to ‘strengthen the state’s role in the broadest spectrum of cultural institutions while at the same time gradually limiting private persons’ ability to function and operate’ (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 40). One tactic in the quest to gain this increased control over culture was to target ‘collaborators’ from the Nazi regime from as early as 1945 (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 41). Knapík describes how the ‘meagre results’ from 30 investigated cases in the early days following the war motivated the KSČ to go further by targeting ‘actors and filmmakers who had high exposure during the occupation’ (*Ibid.*). It is at this point where the lines between oppressors and oppressed become blurry – of those figures targeted, Vlasta Burian, Lída Baarová, Adina Mandlová and Miloš Havel ‘embodied a strong line to pre-war Czechoslovak film culture’ as well as filmmaking during the Nazi regime; one question the persecution of these figures poses is: what about preeminent figures during this time such as Martin Frič and Otakar Vávra? As the mention of Havel suggests, persecution could be made conveniently. For Jan Čulík:

In inter-war Czechoslovakia and during the Nazi occupation, Miloš Havel was the embodiment of the Czechoslovak film industry. He created the Barrandov Film Studios and when he found himself under pressure from the Nazis in 1939 to give up the studios to them, he managed to negotiate a compromise, as a result of which he was able to produce fifty Czech-language feature films during the Nazi occupation, often on Czech nationalist themes. During the war, he was also able to protect a large number of Czech writers and artists, frequently of a left-wing persuasion, from being sent to hard labour in Germany. Nevertheless, after the war, the communists

confiscated his film empire and Miloš Havel ended up as an émigré in Munich where he eventually died in poverty (Čulík, 2017).

Thus, any notion that Havel was a Nazi collaborator is grossly exaggerated, which in the climate of the 1950s show trials was not unusual. Knapík points to how ‘a number of others secured their impeccability by acquiring a KSČ membership card’ – thus, by joining the oppressors, they were able to avoid their own oppression. By September 1946, a ‘significant reorganization in the production of art films’ brought about the ‘establishment of an important new authority, the Film Artistic Board (*Filmový umělecký sbor*, FIUS), which would have the influence over the particular look of individual films’ (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 45). Crucially, this board included such important members of the literati as Frič and Vávra. Thus, by joining with the oppressive forces, these figures were able to circumvent their own oppression and continue to have an influence over their field.

Petr Szczepanik describes a ‘gradual process of de-centralization and liberalization’ after 1954 (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 73), which Knapík warns can be overstated (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 59). These decentralising developments had a stagnating effect on film production in the years 1948-51, with the creative units put in place having a restrictive impact on filmmakers. Szczepanik describes how these units functioned:

In the state-controlled system of production, the ‘dramaturge’, or the artistic unit head who supervised a group of dramaturges, was basically the equivalent of a producer, though without the usual financial and marketing responsibilities (which were held by the state or the party and its representatives). Dramaturgy was considered the most efficient way for the official ideology to execute control over production processes (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 72).

This state onus on monitoring the implementation of the ‘official ideology’ reinforces Knapík’s warning that a de-centralizing and liberalizing process can be overstated, and Szczepanik continues to describe the prescriptive role of these dramaturge units and their inhibiting effect on film production:

Dramaturges and their units oversaw script development, the selection of cast and crew, in some cases the actual shooting as well as post-production, and occasionally even distribution./ For today's historians, dramaturgy and the units stand as a key feature for the 'the [sic.] State-socialist mode of film production', distinguishing the socialist production systems from Hollywood and West European cinemas at the level of middle management (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 72).

Indeed, Szczepanik discusses this period of integrational politics as the 'film jungle', where the 'fight between the two power centres did not simply result in the victory of the "good", authentic filmmakers':

The parallel political struggle, waged at the highest levels of the establishment . . . resulted in political trials, including that of General Secretary Rudolf Slánský, who was charged with high treason and executed in late 1952 (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 80).

Szczepanik then describes how Vávra, 'the loudest of the veterans', used Slánský's case as a 'political weapon' to identify his enemies:

Those henchman of the conspiratorial centre, sent to Barrandov by the traitor Slánský to overtake power, assembled more than a hundred so-called screenwriters and writers with whom they wanted to expel and replace outstanding Czech writers and filmmakers. Those were mostly untalented but noisy people. They used leftist rhetoric to vulgarize methods of socialist realism, promoted schematism . . . to weaken the authority of the masters (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 80).

This extract demonstrates Vávra's willingness to fight fire with fire: in order to combat the upsurge in the 'untalented but noisy' filmmakers put in place in an attempt to apply soviet models of production to filmmaking, Vávra implicates this cohort with the disgraced Slánský in order to expunge them from his unit. Remarkably, Szczepanik takes the stance that:

[...] Vávra's later moves suggest his goal was not to engage in political struggle with the "second centre" but to build a strong position in the studio and defend traditional standards of professionalism that were impossible to learn from state-planned crash courses. In his view, these standards primarily demanded a quality screenplay with high production values (large sets and carefully choreographed mass scenes (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 81).

While the goal of retaining his own high standards in filmmaking is evident, a degree of self-preservation must also be attributed to Vávra's stance. To implicate others with Slánský was a clear attempt to purge the industry of those put in place to replace him and again blurs the lines between oppressed and oppressor.

Knapík points to the deaths of Stalin and KSČ leader Klement Gottwald in March 1953, and the ensuing socio-political 'thaw', as providing 'important stimuli for the turnaround in social conditions', and that by 1956 a process of decentralization had started to take effect (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 56). Knapík suggests that the 'transfer of management and directing responsibilities for cinemas from the former ČSF [Československý film] to (regional and municipal) peoples' committees on 1 April 1957 signalled a particularly important development in the decentralization process' (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 58). However, Knapík warns that this process was complicated, and these changes 'cannot be automatically associated with an ideological liberalization of the cultural sphere (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 59). Indeed, key New Wave directors Elmar Klos and Ján Kadár were banned from artistic activity for two years in 1959 after the release of their film *Three Wishes* (*Tři přání*).

With regards to dealing with the New Wave out of isolation, this tactic for negotiating oppressive forces by becoming part of them is reflected in the paradoxical effect of the darkly-comic, which is also a feature of the works of Franz Kafka (1883-1924). For Ritchie Robertson, '[p]athos and comedy together [in Kafka's 'The Judgement' and 'Metamorphosis'] point towards a subdued black humour', linking Kafka with the New Wave trope of the darkly comic (Robertson, 2004: 33).¹⁰ Likewise, the Kunderaesque reduces the serious systematically, through mise en abyme, to the point of being laughable in a manner

¹⁰ Ritchie Robertson has published *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) which provides a mixture of biographical information, critical response to texts, general guides to reading Kafka's work, and suggestions for further reading which could be a useful platform for studying the writer in greater depth.

that deflects the system of oppression and avoids the grandeur of its own tragic consequences. Kundera discusses this type of humour and its functioning in this deflective way in his essay on the works of Kafka, 'Somewhere Behind' (1984), where he argues that the Kafkaesque 'accompanies man more or less eternally' (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 83). Ruth V. Gross describes the Kafkaesque as an experience 'in which the everyday becomes uncanny, weird, and anxiety-ridden, for Kafka, the everyday meant going to an office job he hated . . . It meant living a double life.' (Gross in Preece, 2002: 80). This reiteration of characters doubling in the face of adversity opens up a question over guilt and where it lies: with the oppressors or with the oppressed themselves? This question forms part of the quandary Vávra finds himself in, in which he is perceived both as a victim of the system and as an individual who uses cunning to capitalise on his wider environment, much like Crispin, Švejk and Kopfrkingl. Yet the 'darkness' within the comedy suggested by Robertson is achieved via 'pathos', which suggests pity or sadness. One of the doubling techniques within Kafka's writing is its sober realism versus its fantastic elements.¹¹ This might lead a reader to question the motivation for this, a question which is relevant in relation to the deployment of the darkly comic in the New Wave and as a Czech literary tradition. One answer is that the darkly-comic denounces realism, as Robertson argues in relation to Kafka:

There is no longer a stable reality out there, on which the realist text can offer a window. There are only versions of reality which may be profoundly inadequate or mistaken . . . (Robertson, 2004: 33)

This lack of a stable reality is what Kafka is addressing, and the fluctuating borders presented in the New Wave suggest an attack on the socialist realist representation of the 'reality' of the time. While this can be construed as an attack on the socio-political conditions of the time, I would argue that it is more of an attack on the aesthetics of the time. As the tactic for dealing with the oppressive force of the soviet production model on filmmaking

¹¹ Robertson discusses the link between realism and [German] Expressionism in Kafka's work (Robertson, 2004: 31-39)

used by Vávra demonstrates, acts of subversion are not necessarily politically motivated; rather, they are a means of executing artistic expression within an oppressive system.

ATTACKING AESTHETICS: DISRUPTION OVER DESTRUCTION

The version of reality which was profoundly inadequate for New Wave filmmakers was thus Socialist Realism. As Forman argues:

[My] films were provoked by the idiocy – by the absolute imbecility – of the film produced by the Communist studios in Prague and in Moscow, everywhere in Communist countries, where everything was so artificial, so far-fetched, so unreal and untrue that we only wanted to see some reality, some real people on the screen (Forman quoted in *Facets Cinémathèque*, 2008).

Forman is frustrated by the aesthetic window to reality proffered by Socialist Realist cinema and, like Kafka, decides to offer something else. Dissent in the New Wave, however, had to be presented underhand rather than as a direct challenge to the serious wider situation of the Communist regime. Hames, meanwhile, points to Czech philosopher Karel Kosík, suggesting that he ‘saw cinema as attacking the existing bureaucratic regime in its core and essence’ but that ‘this was not achieved by direct attacks on the government and veiled political allusion but by emphasising “such basic aspects of human existence as the grotesque, the tragic, the absurd, death, laughter, conscience and moral responsibility”’ (Kosík quoted in Hames, 2004: 140). The difference in my approach to this question of how subversion was achieved in spite of the regime is in addressing films which came before and after the Communist regime, taking the New Wave out of isolation. Without the staunch censorship of the regime, pre-Communist and post-Communist Czech cinema, I will argue, continues to focus on these ‘basic aspects of human existence’ Kosík outlines. There are contemporary socio-economic circumstances for the post-1989 films which are not simply positive because the regime has fallen, and the characters in the films I will discuss in my

third chapter have to deal with their environment with similar constraints and deploy similar cunning to characters in the New Wave in negotiating their own conditions.

This point was earlier picked up by Gedeon who, while highlighting differences between the New Wave and the contemporary periods, underlines a preference for ‘art film’ over ‘entertainment film’, and laments the necessity under contemporary conditions to succumb to commercial pressure under capitalism. The genre of comedy and the link between ‘sarcasm’ and the sardonic, darkly-comic (or ‘absurd’, as Kosík calls it) strand of the New Wave also links the two periods. Gedeon, a FAMU graduate, is reacting to what he considers to be negative aspects of contemporary filmmaking just as Forman attests were the motivations behind his desire to put the ‘real’ on the screen in the 1960s: to challenge the presentation of his contemporary reality. Forman argues that: ‘We were reacting to the bad films. Our provocation wasn’t to follow, but destroy the lies, the empty films of Czechoslovakia in that era’ (Forman in Pawlikowski, 1990). Under capitalism, and with the onus on commercial success, Gedeon aspires to make films which challenge commercially-motivated ‘entertainment’ films. Thus, like Forman, protesting his own contemporary conditions is a key concern for Gedeon.

The desire to ‘destroy the lies’ Forman outlines is echoed by Chytilová when discussing her pre-eminent New Wave film *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky*, 1966): ‘I got together with [screenwriter] Ester Krumbachová and we tried to give the [sense of “making fun”] a more universal significance. What we were interested in was the idea of destruction’ (Chytilová in Pawlikowski, 1990). Again, this ‘making fun’ links the two periods through Gedeon’s idea of the modern-day ‘playground’. Gedeon laments the ‘chaos’ of the modern-day environment, yet Menzel describes a similarly uncoordinated situation in the 1960s: ‘We never had a particular aim; we never wanted to become the “New Wave”’ (Menzel in Pawlikowski, 1990). In *Daisies*, two young women take part in a series of uncoordinated *disruptions* to the

status quo – the patriarchal setting of the Prague elite – not so much *destruction* as Chytilová suggests – this is a key distinction I intend to make in relation to both Cixous's feminist manifesto 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and the perception of where success with regards to the New Wave lies. As previously highlighted, the question over Vávra's integrity as a filmmaker, in which he is perceived both as a victim of the system and as an individual with an ability to capitalise on his wider environment is connected to this question of the overall success of the New Wave, and to the question of how it was allowed to happen under the regime. By comparing the suggestion on how to circumnavigate phallogocentric conditions proposed by Cixous in 'Laugh of the Medusa' with how Crispin's actions reinforce the authorities' control in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, one answer to the question of whether this type of subversion helps to uphold the system will be offered.

When the space of 'feminism' is widened to mean more than 'the feminine in relation to the masculine', as Mazierska proposes, Cixous's 'write her self' could be applied equally to Kopřivný's half-Jewish wife Dagmar, who speaks out against the tide of Aryan ideology, and to the protagonist in *Closely Observed Trains*, Miloš, whose moment of self-realisation comes when he disrupts, rather than destroys, the Nazi train lines by blowing up a munitions train. Cixous argues that 'what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project' (Cixous in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2010: 161). What the disruption in *Daisies*, for example (this will be applied to other films throughout this thesis) demonstrates, however, is merely that: a disruption. Eventually order is restored. Cixous states a refusal to 'strengthen [the effects of the past] by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural', while at the same time discussing 'female sexuality' as being 'infinitely rich' and not 'uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes' as opposed to male sexuality (Cixous in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2010: 161). Cixous's subversion is associated with this drive to

‘disrupt and destroy’. For example, by *writing* that she ‘speaks’ she is demonstrating opposition to the rules governing text at the same time as generating text, and she posits her female sexuality as *opposed* to male desire under phallogocentrism, while arguing a ‘refusal’ to ‘confuse the biological and the cultural’. For Cixous, female desire is ‘infinite’ and ‘women’s desire is inexhaustible’, whereas male desire, which is intrinsically connected to phallogocentric culture, as Baudrillard suggests, exhausts itself at the point of climax (Baudrillard, 1990: 16). The crucial point when considering her opposition to the rules governing the text, however, is in relation to this term ‘codes’, which Cixous argues female desire is opposed to. For Barthes, ‘a code cannot be destroyed, only “played off”’ (Barthes, 1977: 144); thus, when Cixous attempts to subvert the phallogocentric text from within she only adds to this sense of disruption, or ‘playing off’, over any real destruction. This is linked to Hames’ assertion about the Czechoslovak New Wave, that it is ‘no doubt significant that all these direct criticisms came from within the Party’ (Hames, 2004: 155) and Liehm’s lament that ‘only two thousand out of fifteen million people in the nation publicly stood up in opposition [to the Communist regime]’ (Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2). While only a small minority stood up against the overarching ideology, even they were to some extent complicit in its edification; Cixous is doing something similar as ‘author’ within a ‘project’ she explicitly states is aimed at destroying women’s oppression under phallogocentrism.

The question which these insufficiencies with regards to subversion provoke is actually posited by Cixous, when ‘woman’ is considered as a culturally oppressed individual¹², rather than on a biological basis:

Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn’t been ashamed of her strength? ... Her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble (Cixous in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2010: 162).

¹² This approach is treated at length in such post-colonial theory as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003)

‘Trouble’, it would seem, is the only weapon *écriture féminine* has in its armoury and I will demonstrate this in the discussions on the films in this thesis. That the weapon for causing trouble against the phallogocentric text offered by Cixous is ‘to write’ only makes this offensive even more flaccid: ‘Write, let no one hold you back’, she proposes, continuing:

To write. An act which will not only realise the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her [body]... tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination (Cixous in Burke, Crowley & Girvin, 2010: 165).

Cixous argues that to write will give woman back to her body, the metaphor she has used for the ‘infinite’ and the ‘inexhaustible’ in relation to desire; indeed, Barthes’s argument that the text ‘ceaselessly posits meaning’ to ‘ceaselessly evaporate it’ points to one of the problems of phallogocentrism’s drive towards meaning, the final signified, and the impossibility of this. Cixous proposes a feminist approach to the text which encourages the ceaseless positing of meaning with the ceaseless evaporation of it. One of the problems this approach faces, however, is when, as Baudrillard argues, ‘interpretation is so characteristically opposed to seduction’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 152). For Baudrillard, ‘appearances . . . are the site of play and chance taking the site of a passion for diversion – to reduce signs is here far more important than the emergence of any truth’ (*Ibid.*).

NORMALIZATION AND CZECH CUNNING

Likewise, Charles Crispin is left in no doubt that the authorities were on to him in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, but this will *normalise* his behaviour to play by the rules, respect the codes, in future. Normalization had a similar effect on Czechoslovak cinema: works were banned, filmmakers fled, or, in the case of Vávra, got in line and produced censor-friendly cinema. Indeed, describing his Normalization-period film *The Liberation of Prague* (*Osvobození Prahy*, 1975), Vávra admits that ‘I suppose [the film] was propaganda for the liberation. But I

didn't lie in it, I just couldn't say the whole truth, which I suppose is a form of lying, too' (Vávra in Pawlikowski, 1990). Thus, the New Wave caused a series of disruptions, much like Crispin's actions in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, but did not destroy the system.

Similarly, while the series of disruptions in *Daisies* allow female characters to perform in subversive roles and play with the audience's expectations, the system of patriarchy remains intact and, crucially, by the end of the film it is the two girls who are destroyed by an opulent chandelier. As a symbol of the bourgeois structure being targeted by the girls, the chandelier's destruction is less significant than that of the two women: chandeliers (like munitions trains and tracks) can be replaced, the girls (like Miloš) cannot. There is no victory against the patriarchal status quo offered here, but the girls do have fun at its expense, albeit to their own eventual detriment. Unless Crispin changes his behaviour in future, or 'normalises' it, he will suffer the same fate. This message suited the authorities after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 and during the period of Normalization.

In terms of the 'universal significance' sought by Chytilová, the success of these art films in having 'reached the whole world' (Girelli, 2014: 49) is compounded by filmmakers achieving success, notoriety, fame, even awards (Ján Kadar and Elmar Klos's *A Shop on the High Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965) and Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains* both won Academy Awards for Best Foreign Film in 1965 and 1968 respectively). Perhaps the focus, as Kosík argues, on the 'most basic aspects of human existence' helped make the films more universally accessible, yet the subversion of genre, as in the case of *Closely Observed Trains*, a comedy in which the comic hero suffers a tragic fate, suggests that the films were feeding into something else with global significance: a 'rebellious youth culture in Europe and the USA', which Girelli attests came after World War II (Girelli, 2014: 49).

Hames argues that New Wave films that have reached the shortlist for the Oscars have 'all contained large measures of comedy' although some 'mix comic and tragic modes. In

fact, all of them could be described as comedies with an edge' and that the 'Czech industry is pretty good at producing comedies' which also 'travel to the outside world' (Hames, 2004: 117). It is not enough to say that by some fluke Czech comedies 'travel well', but by drawing on Kosík's argument about the basic aspects of human experience – which are universally accessible – and subversion of the comedy genre in this darkly-comic trope which fitted the global spirit of dissent Girelli alludes to, an understanding of the New Wave's wider appeal can be reached. Yet this appeal also suggests an ability to negotiate oppressive conditions for the filmmakers' own benefit, a trait which Kundera argues is part of 'the stubbornness, the common assent and the cunning of the [Czech] people' (Kundera, 1985: 101). This 'cunning' is linked to the ability to circumvent the system Forman describes in the deployment of comedy as a tool for deflecting attention from the authorities. Menzel accompanies this sentiment when he states that:

We Czechs have never believed in anything much, we have always been heretics. We have learnt to look under the surface; we take pleasure in picking holes in everything that is great and famous, showing the flipside of everything (Menzel in Pawlikowski, 1990).

This acts as an apology for those who gained success under the Communist regime during the Czechoslovak New Wave. Menzel takes pride in the supposed national characteristic of 'not believing in anything much', such as the overarching regime, and in showing its flipside. Yet A.J. Liehm, in the twenty-first century, argues that:

We are hiding behind the word 'Bolshevik' calling every day from the grave the ghost of Communism. But one day [they will] show us a mirror reflecting normalization, its legacy and ourselves . . . And then we will be able to breathe again (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2001: 1).

By using the term 'hiding', A.J. Liehm suggests guilt on the part of those suffering from the 'ghost of Communism' in the twenty-first century. This guilt is part of the Kafkaesque atmosphere of feeling slighted by impersonal forces but pretending not to take it personally; and furthermore, feeling that somehow you deserved it. A.J. Liehm suggests that

by closely examining Normalization, or using Menzel's Czech character trait of 'picking holes', critics will find 'ourselves' (i.e. Czechs) reflected along with the legacy of Normalization. Thus, the supposed oppressed will stand side-by-side with the forces which oppress them. This overlap between the oppressed and the oppressors is explored in one of Kafka's parables, 'Before the Law' ('*Vor dem Gesetz*', 1915), which generates this shroud of uncertainty over questions of guilt and avoiding the inevitable. A man comes up to a gate where a gatekeeper denies him entry. He is given no reason and is told that should he pass this gate he will only meet another where an even more rigid gatekeeper will deny him access and on and on. This signifies a construction of large forces seemingly outwith the man's control which oppress him, but when he is told at the end of the narrative and just before his demise that the gate was made only for him, a sense of taking it personally is generated. Not only does the idea of an infinite labyrinth of gates denying one access heighten the sense of *mise en abyme*, the arbitrariness of this structure creates questions over who is responsible, and why. Derrida explores this theme in his essay which lends its name from Kafka's work, 'Before the Law' ('*Devant la Loi*'). Derrida discusses an 'indefinite adjournment' and 'interminable *différance*' as the themes of the story (Derrida in Attridge, 1992: 204). He continues:

After the first guardian there are an undefined number of others, perhaps they are innumerable, and progressively more powerful and therefore more prohibitive, endowed with greater power of delay. Their potency is *différance*, an interminable *différance*, since it lasts for days and 'years', indeed, up to the end of man. *Différance* till death, and for death, without end because ended. As doorkeeper represents it, the discourse of the law does not say 'no', but 'not yet', indefinitely (Derrida in Attridge: 1992: 204).¹³

¹³ In Benoît Peeters's biography of Derrida, he recounts an episode where the French philosopher was arrested in Prague in December 1981 (Peeters, 2013: 332-341). A member of the French version of the Oxford-created Jan Hus Educational Foundation, Derrida was travelling to Czechoslovakia in solidarity with Czechoslovak academics suffering under the regime. He was arrested following a customs sting in Prague and Peeters describes the aftermath of his release: 'As Kafka had been frequently mentioned during the previous day's questioning – Derrida was writing the paper "Before the Law" for the Lyotard conference, had been to Kafka's tomb during his stay in Prague – the lawyer told him, "in an aside: 'You must have the impression of living in a Kafka story'" (Peeters, 2013: 337).

This ‘interminable *différance*’ is a theme I will explore elsewhere in this thesis, especially in relation to Menzel’s *Closely Observed Trains*, set in an unnamed train station which acts as terminus, calling point and origin within the overarching World War II narrative.

Yet the attempts by characters to navigate their oppressive environments has a precedent outside the New Wave, such as in the Martin Frič films discussed in this introduction. Czech characters have to negotiate large, impersonal structures which present obstacles to self-fulfilment – such as the economic constraints which keep the protagonist out of work in *Life is Hard* and the conspiracy narrative which Crispin has to negotiate in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* – and these Kafkaesque nuances will be examined in the first two chapters relating to the New Wave and the hinge between the New Wave and Normalization, then the post-Communist films discussed in the third chapter.

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF: AN INTERMINABLE TERMINUS

Kafka alludes to the circular nature of phallogocentrism, of history repeating itself, in the allusion to the Christian Bible in his parable ‘Before the Law’. The Old Testament story of Noah and the Flood, which is preceded by the chapter ‘Before the Flood’, also belongs to the even older testament of Jewish Written Law. This reflects the Kafkaesque labyrinthine structure in relation to text, history and narrative and interrogates what actually happens when a ‘new wave’ designed to overhaul the environment appears in phallogocentric culture. In the Book of Genesis, God, unhappy with the ‘wickedness of man’ on earth, anoints the patriarch Noah, instructing him to build an ark so that he survives a great flood while the antediluvian population is wiped out. The Flood Subsides (chapter 8), They Disembark (9) and there is a New World Order (10). We then come full circle in chapter eleven to the Patriarchs After the Flood. Thus, there has been a revolution in ‘world order’, but the residue of ‘old’, the

patriarchs, are still in control. Given the string of revolutions worldwide since the French Revolution at the close of the eighteenth century and the state of global flux caused by the upheaval of two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, the temporal space of the 1960s is thus imbued with concerns of ‘new waves’ of ideology thrust on vast bodies of people. There is something funny (funny meaning humorous and strange at the same time) again about this in relation to the revolution depicted in the Old Testament Flood. Noah’s Ark is an episode that defers any final signified and is thus another instance of *différance*. It is a process that is repeated in the New Testament with the arrival of Jesus Christ:

For as in the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24: 37-39)

To draw parallels between Jesus and the Flood is to draw attention to Christianity’s place in the history of phallogocentrism, such as the Patriarchs After the Flood – ‘after the flood’ the conditions of patriarchy remain intact. There is a Kafkaesque deepening of the labyrinth in this: when posed metaphorically against Czechoslovak twentieth-century history, it illustrates how the ideologies thrust upon its people are ‘new waves’, or ‘new Floods’, which purport to sweep away all that had gone before whilst retaining the residue of old; of history repeating itself; *disruptions* rather than *destruction*.

Kafka, born in 1883 in Prague, had *Metamorphosis* published during the First World War, in the liminal space of the twilight of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the birth of the Czechoslovak republic came the Great Depression, and by 1939 the Nazis had successfully invaded Czechoslovakia. Following the devastation of WWII there was Communism. Thus, this was an incredible period of socio-political upheaval which delivered several ‘new waves’ but, as Barthes suggests, no narrative is ever truly original, and these revolutions are hinged on denying the ‘pseudo-theologies’ of past ideological forces by obliterating them, a process which had an indelible impact on Czechoslovak cinema in the

wake of World War II. Knapík describes how ‘basic life’ for Czechoslovaks ‘differed fundamentally’ after 1945 from the ‘so-called First Republic (1918-1938)’, with a major factor being that ‘the sizeable German minority population was expelled’ (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 39). This obliteration of the German population was carried out as ‘free political competition was fundamentally limited because the traditional right-wing parties could not be revived’ after Nazism. However, Karl and Skopal demonstrate how this severance with Germany was not so absolute. They argue that, while relations remained distrustful between Czechoslovakia and East Germans in the GDR after the war, there remained a ‘coalition’ which:

[...] had its own internal motivations and driving forces: in additions to sharing certain economic interests, the partners were unified in their resistance to the militarization of the FRG at the end of 1954 . . . another major point of convergence between the East Germans and Czechoslovak socialist programmes was . . . a shared scepticism of the Polish ‘October’ (Karl & Skopal, 2015: 3).

Thus, while the new wave of socialism opposed the German population in Czechoslovakia, the residue of past relations remained. Barthes continues that:

by [writing’s refusal] to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law (Barthes, 1977: 147).

Barthes refers to ‘the world as text’ post-Enlightenment in relation to ‘reason, science, law’ and alludes to the phenomenon of logocentrism. The self-reflexive problem here in relation to logocentrism is with the term ‘in the end’ since, of course, there is no end to the text: as Barthes argues there is no ‘ultimate meaning’ since that ‘end’ would be a terminus and would thus mark the end of culture. Jean Baudrillard argues that:

All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God of course (Baudrillard, 1994: 5-6).

The Christian Bible ostensibly holds on to the ‘old’ with the Old Testament, and just as Noah’s Ark demonstrates how the residue of patriarchy remains ‘after the flood’, the recurrence of this story in the New Testament is an example of this metaphor of liminality in action, whose in-between status marks how beginnings and ends under logocentrism are blurred into a state of self-perpetuating circularity, or ‘history repeating itself’, a phenomenon reflective of *différance*. Baudrillard then questions: ‘But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith?’ (Baudrillard, 1994: 6). This plays into the ‘pseudo-theology’ Kundera suggests Kafka engaged in, and Baudrillard proposes to answer this conundrum with:

Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacra – not unreal, but a simulacra, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference of circumference (Baudrillard, 1994: 6).

Barthes’s death of the author is thus another example of *différance*: his denial of the ‘pseudo-theology’ of the Author God comes with its own Nativity: the Barthesian ‘birth of the Reader’, which as ‘pseudo-theology’ adheres to the Baudrillardian laws of ‘good faith’. For Barthes, the Reader is the ‘space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but its destination’ (Barthes, 1977: 148). The effect here, however, is *différance*: Barthes makes and surrenders his argument with the term ‘destination’. His Reader is in fact the terminus for the arrival of the previous of the text, at the same time as its departure lounge into its ‘future’. This resonates with the Kafkaesque atmosphere which, as Kundera argues, is ‘more or less’ eternal (Gross, 1990: 83). The Kafkaesque is thus an ‘anti-theological’ terminus that defers access to the source and to the destination; an interminable terminus functioning within logocentric culture and its resonances are deeply felt in the films studied here.

The series of ideological waves thrust upon the Czechoslovak people and the rest of the Eastern Bloc in the twentieth century marks the physical space as a site for this ‘great laboratory’; however, Kundera also attests that:

Jews or Czechs have not usually identified themselves with history or thought that its events are serious or intelligible. Their age-old experience has taught them to stop worshipping the goddess History and eulogizing her wisdom (Kundera, 1985: 91).

It seems unfathomable that Jews, with their profound history of persecution, including *The Early* twentieth-century’s anti-Semitic Europe which led to the Holocaust, who were the bearers of extreme socio-political upheaval in that century, could ‘ignore’ history. Yet this reflects Menzel’s claim about Czechs having ‘never believed in anything much’. By making this claim Kundera, like Menzel, is feeding into the ‘anti-theological’ activity of denouncing the ‘goddess’ of History and in doing so performs the Barthesian call to the death of the author of this Czech history. The unhomely feeling of being trapped within huge, impersonal forces (like that of an unwelcome history), yet somehow taking it personally; of feeling slighted by external forces but feeling at home in the system; of being at home in one’s body at the same time as feeling like something else, are all at the heart of the Kafkaesque, which according to Kundera is not ‘historically determined’ but stays with man eternally.

DOUBLING AS OPPRESSOR

The Kafkaesque helps to generate a deepening of the nuances of the ‘impersonal forces’ surrounding the Czech characters in these films as the historical narrative of the twentieth century deepens in a deepening of the phallogocentric labyrinth. This is connected to the argument over Vávra’s self-interest in relation to Crispin’s actions in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*: the easy thing for Crispin, or Vávra, to do would be to play by the rules and do nothing. Instead, they take risks, albeit with the carrot of personal gain. Conversely, the viewer, who can make judgements on the motivations for these risks, is impotent with regards

to the action. In watching and judging, the viewer, or Reader, too, becomes complicit in the overarching system.

This complicity is targeted by the feeling of surveillance on the everyday produced in the camera techniques of the New Wave, which were opposed to the Cultural Committee of the KSČ's resolution entitled 'On Behalf of high ideological and artistic standards for Czechoslovak film' from April 1950, outlined by Knapík, which 'proclaimed itself the main cultural-political directive for cinema and went on to have a fundamental impact on film and artistic production' (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 50). Knapík adds:

Particular attention was given to historic films, which were supposed to contribute to the legitimization of communist power ('they must not become only entertainment, apolitical spectacle'). With regards to artistic interpretation, which it understood as an equally important ideological demand, the resolution stressed the importance of the socialist realist method but also added the caveat that 'film production must refrain from all pitfalls of the naturalist and static description of reality and vulgarization' (Knapík in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 51).

The onus on historic films may explain the development of this genre as a tool to circumvent censorship in satire, as Vávra demonstrates in his *Witchhammer*. However, while Petr Szczepanik points to a gradual process of de-centralization after, Knapík's warning that this can be overstated is important. Szczepanik concedes that 'only gradually, and in several stages, did the political authorities come to acknowledge film production as creative work that cannot be planned, measured and paid for according to the number of products and working hours' (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 77). It took until January 1963 for the Central Committee to commission the director of Czechoslovak Film to 'liberate film production from all remaining "inappropriate and outdated indicators for measuring industrial production"' (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 78). By this stage, Forman presented a style of film opposed to the original guidelines; however, he has been criticised for

apparently mocking ordinary people, with A.J. Liehm describing his ‘close-ups as punctuation and his sly cruel humour, his ugly beauty’ (A.J. Liehm quoted in Roud, 1980). The deployment of non-actors in central roles as a New Wave motif helped to generate this effect, but Forman rejects that his techniques for generating a kind of sardonic humour are aimed at the ‘ordinary man’ but that the artistic field of film in Communist countries was saturated with ‘idiocy’ and ‘imbecility’, created within the superficiality of Socialist Realism, which was the target of his attack (Forman quoted in *Facets Cinémathèque*, 2008)

A prevailing theme in *The Firemen’s Ball* is the disconnection between the older generation and the young generation of the 1960s which reflects the proponents of the New Wave. This much scrutiny must be apportioned to Szczepanik when arguing that ‘the new, young generation did not compete with the old but chose instead to look up to figures such as Vávra and Frič as teachers and truly “classic” filmmakers who guaranteed continuity of the film craft’ (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 81). Of course, Vávra in particular, as tutor at FAMU to the New Wave filmmakers, had a great influence over the younger generation; but this theme of conflict between old and young evident throughout the New Wave (and which will be discussed at length in this thesis) is at odds with Szczepanik’s claim, who goes as far as to suggest ‘generational conflicts seemed to be overcome’ (Szczepanik in Karl & Skopal, 2015: 81), which should be treated with caution. Indeed, as suggested earlier in this introduction, Vávra’s motivations to expel to creative units, formed of young, inexperienced workers, were at least partly about self-preservation and suspicion of what the outcome was going to be for those who had worked under the previous regime.

Suspicion plays a significant role in how the Czech characters in these films behave, and likewise viewers must bring an air of suspicion to proceedings. In Kachyňa’s *The Ear*, the authorities’ culpability for the feeling of a self-reflexively artificial space where everyone is suspicious of the ‘truth’ (because the cinema is self-reflexively one such place) is made

explicit in the film's dealing with characters suffering the intrusion of listening devices on their home. The object here is not just to laugh at the characters but to understand their actions under the paranoid atmosphere of overarching surveillance which has infiltrated their habits to the point of peer-to-peer surveillance. This provides an enactment of the individual doubling as oppressor which helps to edify totalitarian societies: the oppressed becomes the oppressor in Kafkaesque style, and yet here the tragedy of this doubles as humour – not, as Kundera argues, to lighten the tone, but to deny the characters the 'grandeur' of the status 'tragic hero'. For Forman, the idiocy of the environment surrounding him does not warrant this 'grandeur', it is so imbecilic it can only be laughed at.

As alluded to at the beginning of this introduction, in Michálek's *Bored in Brno* there is rarely a moment when the characters are not tuned in to apparatus of control under consumer society. Yet the comparison comes with how these apparatus were a means of propping up totalitarian society, not least through films such as Nazi propaganda or the Socialist Realist films Forman so despised. This idea of external forces 'haunting' from 'somewhere behind' generates a sense of the Kafkaesque, which for Kundera 'is like a humorous story, a joke: it provides laughter', but 'it's small comfort for [Kafka's characters] to know that his story is funny' (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 81).

Like the effect of *différance*, comedy defers its own meaning here in a manner which adds to its meaning. My discussions on Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains*, Forman's *The Firemen's Ball* and Jan Němec's *A Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*, 1966) in my first chapter will aim to illuminate the strong Kafkaesque strand running through them and their intertextual play with texts coming before (with my example in Frič and the Kafkaesque) and those coming after in subsequent chapters.

With Kafka operating on the hinge of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the birth of the Czechoslovak nation, and with the theme of liminality in mind, a sense of

the grotesque strand coming from Kafka gains significance throughout, exploring how the prevalent concerns of the twentieth century continue to impact on Czech culture, and how the accepted 'new wave' of democracy carries with it its own Kafkaesque nuances the post-Communist films' characters have to negotiate.

A.J. Liehm argues that 'Kundera once wrote that Stalinist socialism allowed us to see sides of human character we sometimes sensed but haven't seen or refused to see' and that '[h]istorians, sociologists, philosophers and artists owe us answers to the questions these facts present' (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2-3). My aim is not to attempt to provide unequivocal answers to these profound questions, but at least to contribute to the interrogation which clearly needs to be made.

CHAPTER ONE: UNDERCURRENTS AND THE CZECHOSLOVAK NEW WAVE

COMPLIANCE AND DEFIANCE

In considering the Czechoslovak New Wave as a phenomenon which should not be treated as an isolated occurrence, it is worth remembering that those filmmakers who worked between 1963-8 also worked before the Prague Spring, after, and in some case both (Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014:148). The sense of overlap this generates helps to blur the lines between dissent and consent within the Communist regime, since some of those considered to be acting rebelliously during the 1960s worked during the period of Normalization, such as Otakar Vávra who was discussed in the introductory chapter. With regards to the idea of the New Wave filmmakers being voices of dissent – part of the minority ‘two thousand out of fifteen million people in the nation [who] publicly stood up in opposition [to the Communist regime]’ Antonín J. Liehm attests to (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2) – the production of any film deemed fit for production under totalitarian censorship raises the question of compliance on the filmmakers’ part. Indeed, Peter Hames argues that it is ‘no doubt significant that all these direct criticisms [from the New Wave] came from within the Party’, since filmmakers without party membership would not be allowed to work (Hames in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 155). Hames is right to point out the overlap of working under the regime in a state-sponsored industry whilst criticising the regime; however, not all filmmakers were party members. Indeed, Normalization highlighted those who were more closely affiliated to the regime in their ability to continue working while other New Wave directors emigrated and/or were banned by the authorities. Hames argues that the attitude towards those who continued to work during Normalization was thus skewed after the fall of Communism when ‘directors of the New Wave who had sustained a level of creativity in the “Normalization years” . . . stood condemned [post-1989] as giving credence to the regime’ (Hames in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 148).

Conversely, Radko Pytlík points to how those who did not work during the Normalization period ‘adjusted to the given circumstances’ (Pytlík: 2000, 71). Thus, those who continued to work in the film industry during the period of Normalization were condemned as collaborators of the system and those who did not work were condemned as passive collaborators. This blurring of dissent and consent has a similarly overlapping effect to that of the New Wave. The treatment of the New Wave as not existing in isolation this thesis projects is reflective of these overlaps as part of the cyclical nature of phallogocentric culture as discussed in the introductory chapter.

These overlaps of beginnings and endings draw attention to the setting of the train station in Menzel’s *Closely Observed Trains* as an important allegorical space occupying a point of terminus at the same time as a point of departure. Menzel’s film invokes the spirit of collaboration as a feature of the New Wave, where directors, writers, actors, non-actors, musicians, singers and pop stars all take on a crossing-over of roles. This crossing-over develops a sense of liminality and has the Pirandellian effect of blurring the lines between the real, off-stage (which is always in the background to the action), and the imagined, on-stage, invoking Kundera’s Kafkaesque as ‘somewhere behind’. With the arguments on the ‘space’ of the New Wave as both an arrival point for the filmmakers before 1963 and a departure point for those who went on to work creatively after 1968, Liehm, who co-founded a pro-Communist literary magazine in the wake of World War II, acknowledges that the 1960s regime had its advantages for filmmakers in Czechoslovakia and supports the nationalised industry as one which ‘[freed] filmmakers from the dependency on the market and box office and moved film closer to art’ (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 1). Indeed, Jiří Knapík argues that while ‘nationalization enabled the KSČ [*Komunistická strana Československa* (The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia)] to take control of cinema more rapidly and to a far greater extent’, there were positives to be gleaned from this process (Knapík in Karl &

Skopal, 2015: 46). Knapík argues that the ‘process of nationalization also professionalised the film craft’ and points to the creation of the Academy of Performing Arts (*Filmová fakulta Akademie múzických umění*, FAMU) on October 27, 1945 (Ibid).

Here the idea of collaboration with the regime stimulates the New Wave, where the movement relies on the conditions of a Communist-state-run film industry to accelerate, especially with regards to the FAMU students at the heart of the movement. Indeed, one such student, Menzel, describes the 1960s era as his ‘favourite’ to work in, with the ‘ideal atmosphere to make films’ and a ‘stimulus for creativity to break the ideological barrier’ (Menzel in Buchar, 2004: 38). This jars with the notion of the Communist regime as an oppressive force denying creativity and as such being the focus of dissent by the filmmakers of the New Wave, who by this logic benefit from this stage.

These sentiments reverberate with how the New Wave propels beyond the space of Czechoslovakia and reflects a global sense of political upheaval in the 1960s. Hames quotes Jan Švankmajer as stating that the ‘1960s was a time when art had a tangible effect on social and political development’ (Hames quotes Švankmajer in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 147). With Liehm’s assertion that the nationalised industry in Czechoslovakia allowed films to get closer to ‘art’, and with Menzel’s argument that the 1960s was an invigorating atmosphere to work in, the site of the Czechoslovak New Wave was therefore conducive to having this ‘tangible effect on social and political development’. Thus, the Communist regime was providing a kind of democratic stage for subversive art; the paradox of this freedom under totalitarianism again invokes Derridean *différance* since the regime ought to oppose a democratic stage; yet, in its rigidity, the regime actually proved conducive to this environment by allowing, as Liehm suggests, films to get closer to ‘art’.

Much of the action in Menzel’s *Closely Observed Trains* takes place in the train station protagonist Miloš Hrna (Václav Neckár) works at. Elisabetta Girelli describes this

unnamed Czech station as a 'key juncture' along German train lines in Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia, again generating a liminal space between cultures and borders (Girelli, 2011: 55). This train station marks a point of terminations and of departures – of beginnings and endings – occurring in the same place. The motif of train as liminal object able to traverse cultural and physical borders is one the title of Menzel's film instructs us to 'closely observe'. There have been several translations of the title of Bohumil Hrabal's work; the first UK edition translated by Jonathan Cape was entitled *A Close Watch on the Trains* (Jonathan Cape Ltd., July 1968), Abacus published Cape's translation as *Closely Observed Trains* (London: Abacus, 1990), while Edith Pargeter's forthcoming translation of the novella for Penguin Modern Classics is entitled *Closely Watched Trains* (London: Penguin, March 30, 2017). Even these subtle differences have the Derridean effect of both altering the meaning and providing a greater appreciation of the title at the same time. For Roland Barthes:

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination (Barthes, 1977: 148).

With the various translations available in English for *Ostře sledované*, and with Barthes' assertion that 'all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost', again a sense of *différance* is produced. The metaphor of the train, therefore, relates to the unreliability of any historical narrative: an apparently straight projection *going* somewhere is wrapped up in a combination of simultaneously *reaching* a destination which will then become an origin, such as the train station in Menzel's film. As the train shuttles from terminus to termination, Barthes's suggestion that unity lies 'not in its origin but its destination' acts as a challenge to the reader to 'closely observe' the text. The effect of *différance* is that even an object which runs on straight tracks has the ability to bend, which highlights the difficulty in 'closely observing' any narrative. We have seen how the protagonist in Martin Frič's *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, Charles Crispin, fails to closely

observe the narrative presented to him, which is so overtly fictional that it encompasses one of his own fictional characters coming to life. Crispin's willingness to accept this narrative is an example of the careless reader and he is punished, or at least reprimanded, for this by the authorities. The train, conversely, shuttles between origin and destination without bending, but is denied ever truly crossing over since as soon as it has arrived it is then waiting to go somewhere else, which gives it the status of a liminal object – never truly realised – and generates the metaphor for phallogocentric culture, which can never be truly realised.

A PASSION FOR DIVERSION

Jean Baudrillard argues that appearances 'are the very site of play and chance taking the site of a passion for diversion' (Poster, 2001: 152). This 'site of play' pertains to literature, and to the stage of the New Wave in general. The 'passion for diversion' is what allows the viewer to accept a reality made up of appearances within this Baudrillardian hyperreality, and unlike the linearity of the train, go 'off-track'. For Baudrillard, to 'reduce signs here is far more important than the emergence of any truth' (Poster, 2001: 152). This reduction of signs over emergence of truth opposes the supposed omnipotence and linearity of the narrative, outlining the impossibility of a truly closely observed narrative within phallogocentric culture. The subversive strand in Czech literature by definition invokes a sense of going off track; going against the accepted narrative of any time. Thus, the 'absurd' and 'eccentric' characters from 'everyday life' who are wrapped up in 'humour, cruelty and tragedy' are all careless readers of their own environments. The Barthesian Reader's seduction towards this position 'off-track' occupies the point where 'seduction is the necessity of taking the other into account when trying to produce resemblance . . . it is neither the same as simulation nor opposed to it, but *doubles* it (Baudrillard, 1999: 72). The result is the inevitability that 'real'

and ‘narrative’ are entwined within a hyperreality – thus the overarching narrative that those in control are in control is also a hyperreality and, as Forman attests in relation to Prague and Moscow film studios and Socialist Realism’s preposterousness, the role of the New Wave is to challenge this accepted reality. Prominent dissident Czech playwright and first president of the post-Communist republic Václav Havel argued during the period of Normalization that:

Individuals need not believe in these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did . . . for this reason they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it, and in it. For, by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, are the system (Havel, 1987: 45).

In this sense, the question of where to attribute blame, which is a key concern of the Kafkaesque, is turned from the overarching system which is being scrutinised in these films to the characters who both suffer from this oppression while at the same time, in some cases, also help to edify it – whether actively or passively is irrelevant in this sense. Self-reflexively, as viewers, we suspend our belief to follow the action as it takes place, which makes film such an appropriate ‘site of play’ for this type of cultural study.

The perceived freedom enjoyed by filmmakers of the New Wave under Communism is a false economy; they are *characters* within the Communist narrative within history, who regardless of any subversion operate within a limit of subversion: so long as the overarching narrative remains intact subversion only serves to edify that narrative: they are trapped within the Kafkaesque labyrinth. In this sense, accepting a film like *Hard Life of an Adventurer* was of more benefit to the Nazi state than to the spirit of dissent, since even dissenting viewers could be more inclined to digest the product as part of the party production line and even, like Crispin, heed the warning. This effect is replicated in the New Wave where the consequences for subversion are often total: the two disruptive girls in *Daisies* are crushed by a chandelier while Miloš Hirma is shot by a German soldier in *Closely Observed Trains*.

This entrapment within the Kafkaesque labyrinth finds an outlet in laughing at the absurdity of life which these films as comedies depict. Hames argues that ‘a focus on the everyday, laughing at life’ is a ‘kind of defence’ which Ivan Sviták suggests is ‘the most accurate portrait of the Czech character’ (Hames quotes Sviták in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 163). For Kundera, the Kafkaesque is ‘like a humorous story, a joke: it provides laughter’ (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 81). The word he uses to describe a ‘humorous story’ here indicates how the Kafkaesque lingers in Kundera’s own work. Kundera’s first novel *The Joke* (*Žert*, 1967) follows a Party member, Ludvík Jahn, who is punished by the authorities for sending a ‘humorous story’ to a girl in his class because he believes she is too serious. When passed on and examined by colleagues and fellow Party members, this ‘joke’ became incriminatingly serious to its author, who was expelled from the Party and sent down the mines for six years.

Prominent New Wave director Jaromil Jireš adapted Kundera’s novel into a film of the same name released in 1968, which was soon banned following the Warsaw Pact invasion. That episode is ironically self-reflexive: it is ‘funny’ because the film becomes self-fulfilling; but like the plot of the novel, the joke backfires on its author, also mirroring the ramifications for Crispin as author in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*. By invoking the Kafkaesque, Kundera is aware ‘everyone, including the author’ is laughing (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 81). This laughing in the face of adversity is a key dimension of the Kunderaesque, in which its author seeks to get the last laugh. Indeed, in *The Joke* Ludvík seeks revenge by seducing Helena, who is the wife of one of the men who landed him in trouble with the Party. Yet this second ‘joke’ again backfires and this generates another joke – that Ludvík actually does his antagonist a favour. This is a pattern reflected in how the subversive actions performed by Crispin in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* in the end play into the authorities’ hands. The problem for Ludvík is that the joke always ends up on him, and

Kundera highlights how this Kafkaesque crossover between the comic and the tragic is part of everyday life. Indeed, for Kundera, Jireš's treatment of his plot could again have backfired on him – with the author opposing the overtly political slant the director put on the film.

Hames reflects that 'Kundera once criticised the political interpretation [by Jireš], arguing that it was primarily a love story, but the film omits the love story, making it directly political' (Hames in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 154-5). This overview from Kundera is an ironically self-reflexive statement, or joke, and is again part of the Kafkaesque. The label he uses is one often applied to, for instance, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, both of which are of course tragedies. For Kundera:

In the world of the Kafkaesque, comedy is not a counterpoint to tragedy as in Shakespeare; it's not there to make the tragic more bearable by lightening the tone . . . rather it deprives the victims of the . . . consolation deriving from the (real or supposed) grandeur of tragedy (Gross, 1990: 82).

In this sense, Kundera's 'love story' label reduces Ludvík to the position of Kafkaesque-comic victim with no possibility of the 'grandeur' of being the tragic hero in a way which generates another 'joke': for if Jireš, whose treatment of Kundera's story could land him in trouble with the authorities over its overtly political tone, treats a comic victim with such seriousness, the joke then turns on the director. In turn, the joke is really on the authorities, who by treating another comic victim, Jireš, so seriously as to ban him are receiving the butt of two jokes. Hames's argument in relation to Sviták's assertion that 'a focus on the everyday, laughing at life' is a 'kind of defence' which is the most accurate portrait of the Czech character is part of the Kunderaesque here (Hames in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2014: 163). In the Author's Note to the fifth edition in English translation of the novel *The Joke*, Kundera begins that '[i]f it did not concern me, it would certainly make me laugh: this is the fifth English-language version of *The Joke*' (Kundera, 1992: vii). Kundera places himself in the position of comic victim, aware that his position as scrupulous author is one to be laughed at. This self-deprecating humour is given a tone of seriousness which is

benign: it is hardly tragic that he has had five editions of his novel (even if the reason for this is that he was unhappy with the four previous translations) in one of the biggest language-markets in the world in this sense, by accepting one's position as oppressed, there is something to be gained. Kundera performs the role of the Shakespearean fool, a character who can get away with saying whatever he wants. This fool is also a mere commoner in a royal court, who uses his 'cunning' – which for Kundera is a key characteristic of the Czech people – to gain leverage by outwitting those in power. Kundera's positioning himself as the comic victim is a deployment of Kafkaesque doubling to negotiate the environment he finds himself in – much like the fool in Shakespeare.

This overlapping is a theme which is also found in Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains*. The young protagonist Miloš is haunted by the denial of personal space in the film. He cannot follow his sexual desires with his girlfriend Máša (Jitka Bendová) because they are constantly in public and/or private spaces: on the train platform, in her uncle's home (which doubles as the site of his private photography studio open for public consumption). When Miloš stays over at the uncle's house, he can see into the adjacent room where her uncle is sitting having supper and reading the newspaper, and the denial of privacy makes it difficult for Miloš to sustain an erection, for the feeling of being watched or listened to. Kundera describes this public/private overlap as totalitarian society's tendency to 'abolish the boundaries between public and private domains' (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 86), which is reflected in the fact that the uncle's workplace, open to the public, occupies the site of his private home. He goes on to argue that 'what is Kafkaesque is not restricted to the private or to the public domain: it encompasses both. The public is the mirror of the private, the private reflects the public' (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 86-7). This grotesque setting of public/private overlap suffers the same disseminating fate as the train at the film's climax: that of a Barthesian explosion

obliterating its structure, which is received by the uncle, the victim of this explosion, with a Kunderaesque explosion of laughter in the face of his dire circumstances.

Miloš's solution, conversely, to his erectile problem is to attempt suicide – to reach life's true terminus – by renting a room in a brothel and cutting his wrists in the bathroom. The irony of his choice of setting, where 'private' services are offered to the public in the privacy of rented rooms, generates a sense of foreboding that his inability to see his desires through will come back to haunt him, which reverberates with the constant thudding from a workman hammering a drywall. Miloš enters a steaming hot bath, cuts both of his wrists which is captured with gruesome candour, all the while the nauseating thudding from the worker is impinging on his actions. When the worker eventually crashes through the drywall, literally crumbling the flimsy barrier between public and private, he reaches Miloš in time to get medical help. In Kunderaesque fashion, the breakdown between public and private denies Miloš the 'grandeur' of the tragic hero and he is forced via this farce again into the role of comic victim. There is no escape from the public in the private for Miloš and he is thwarted in his own drives.

Miloš's reaction to this is to accept his condition, and so he returns to work. With his predicament over his own sexual proficiency preoccupying him, Miloš encounters a stationery train with a group of nurses gathered outside. The young women graciously receive a group of passing German soldiers and take them onboard the motionless vessel. Aware that the sexual activity he yearns to be engaging in is about to take place, Miloš nips across to have a look. Bearing in mind the significance of the train as the liminal object shuttling between departure and destination, always in a state of becoming, the positioning of this train which is not quite 'at the station' deepens its grotesque nature: it is in a sense nowhere, off the main narrative, or 'somewhere behind' in Kundera's words. This freedom from the rigidity of the linearity of the German lines affords this particular vessel a kind of haven

status, where the soldiers and home guard can take some time out from their public duty and engage in their own sexual desires. This time, however, it is Miloš who is seduced into invading this private haven – which reflects the brothel in that private acts are being performed in a public space. The viewer shares with Miloš the voyeuristic gaze at these actions before he returns to his post having engaged in the kind of oppressive denial of privacy which has thwarted him; he is the oppressed becoming the oppressor.

The medical train remains a part of the train network despite being situated ‘off-stage’ in relation to the station (a ‘key juncture on German lines’). This deepens the grotesque ability to anchor the train back into the Barthesian narrative of the lines which deliver the source emission to its destination. The denial of specific place in relation to the setting has a similar effect. While the station is depicted as a sleepy, dormant, stationery vessel where sexual activity within its confines seems to be the object of everyone inside it, its positioning of ‘somewhere behind’ in the World War II narrative always remains possible. Like the medical train, the train station setting has the potential to join in the grand WWII narrative – to get ‘on track’ – and Miloš’s actions of following in the tracks of the system which oppresses him reflects an ordinary Czech character accepting the conditions of the overarching narrative. Having been oppressed by this system of breaking down private spaces to the point of impotence, Miloš’s sex drive spurs him on to double as oppressor: invading the privacy of others. Then, after returning to work, Miloš is enabled by his sexually liberal colleague Mr Hubička (Josef Somr) to have his first sexual encounter with Viktorie Freie (Nad’a Urbánková, who, like Neckář, was also a well-known Czech singer) in the waiting lounge – the metaphor for this dormant, grotesque position of in-between destination and arrival. Like the rented rooms in the brothel and the nurses’ train carriage, this is a public space made fit for private consumption and Miloš’s ability to adapt to his surroundings mean he is once again virile.

Having felt the oppression of this private and public overlap stint his own desires, to having taken part in an episode of watching others' private encounters, Miloš has progressively fulfilled his desires within the confines of the system he must obey. What follows is that this meagre adolescent (metaphorically in the waiting lounge between youth and adulthood), whose desires were merely of sexual curiosity, turns into the unlikely hero of the film by fulfilling the role of double-agent and dropping the resistance fighters' explosives onto a German munitions train, thus propelling the setting into the grand narrative of World War II; however, he is soon spotted by a Nazi soldier and shot. Miloš has adapted through double-agency to the system for his own arbitrary subsistence within it, but he is forced to accept death as a consequence in Kafkaesque fashion.

The Kunderaesque facet to this is, however, that the Kafkaesque is funny. There is irony in Miloš achieving his death wish at the point where he has supposedly come of age as virile hero; Miloš is disallowed the status of tragic hero and is instead a comic victim. What Kundera demonstrates with his treatment of *The Joke* is that this acceptance of the only true crossing over, of life into death, is not enough. For Kundera, 'thanks to the stubbornness, the common assent and the cunning of the people: what had been banned in the 1960s returned to the stage' (Kundera, 1985: 101). This was the Prague Spring – with that label's connotations of rebirth – and within it the New Wave: the latest phallogocentric resurrection.

PEOPLE MAKE THE SYSTEM

The combination of the absurd and the didactic is also of key concern to New Wave filmmakers. Girelli argues that Communist totalitarianism, 'defined by a combination of oppression and absurdity', generated a sense of dissident 'us' and 'them' (Girelli, 2011: 52); however, Havel's argument that people 'make the system, *are* the system' suggests that their compliance with the narrative for their own ends plays a part in its edification (*Ibid*).

Accepting totalitarianism's hyperreality is a consequence of man's inability to 'closely observe' (instead, to 'coarsely study'), because Baudrillardian seduction causes a derailing of a linear historicity under phallogocentrism.

When this is brought into Liehm's question of holding up a mirror to the Czechoslovak New Wave, ideas of Czechs as mere victims in twentieth-century historical terms become blurry. This uncertainty over blame drives at the essence of the Kafkaesque, to feeling slighted by powers outwith one's control at the same time as somehow feeling responsible for them. What Frič demonstrates in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* is a character propelled by a creation of his own making who as it turns out is actually an agent of the external forces of the state. The film generates a sense of the 'us' and 'them' Havel outlines with an overlap which is an integrally Kafkaesque feature of the New Wave: the narrative expressing a sense of this is not 'us', it is 'them', whilst being forced to accept that 'they' are in fact 'us'. This is because, unlike the apparently linear train, the characters go off in tangents from any narrative concerning 'right' and 'wrong'. For Barthes:

[textual analysis] conceives the text as taken up in an *open* network which is the very infinity of language, itself structured without closure; it tries to say no longer *from* where the text comes (historical criticism), nor even *how* it is made (structural analysis), but how it is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates – by what coded paths it *goes off* (Barthes, 1977: 58).

Closely Observed Trains offers such a textual analysis: while its setting is based on a network of trains which shuttle within a limit of start and finish, and the denial of precise location 'no longer' says *from where* nor *how* it is made, its climax is literally an explosion within this network demonstrating how to 'unmake' the system. Like Barthes's proposed death of the Author, this disseminating action is the most subversive action, since to remove the authors of any grand narrative is, as Barthes suggests, to remove God.

Barthes describes the press photograph as containing a message 'formed by a source of emission, a channel of transition and a point of reception' (Barthes, 1977: 15). In *Closely*

Observed Trains, the train acts as signifier of this ‘channel of transition’ which crosses over divides. We are instructed on how to deal with this motif in the film’s title, and these vessels travel from Germany (the physical source of ‘Nazi’ emission) to Miloš’s workplace (our point of reception in the film); however, for Barthes meaning ‘cannot be conflated by the simple existence of the scene’, it ‘compels an interrogative reading (interrogation bears precisely on the signifier not the signified, on reading not on intellection: it is a “poetical” grasp’ (Barthes, 1977: 53). Here, the significance of the film offering no explicit naming of the ‘scene’ is increased: the train is the everyday object which gains an almost magical quality in Menzel’s film, where the appearance of a ‘press-photograph’, still-image train is betrayed only by sound and an almost magical, fairy-dust explosion of soot twinkling over the vehicle. This is how the significance of the Oscar-winning film as a New Wave torchbearer with global significance is achieved: whilst, in Vávra fashion, denoting an unnamed ‘scene’ pertaining to the ‘old’ World War II setting, the space for this Barthesian ‘third meaning’ generates the interrogative space of allegory, which pertains not only to the contemporary, Communist regime, but to totalitarian societies in general. Given that the *trompe l’oeil* ‘forgets’ the structures it denotes (such as place, time, ideology) but parodies its own theatricality, this metafictional aspect of film allows us to question any truth we take for granted in a universal manner. The train thus signifies a liminal space, that of an object in a state of flux; both a vessel of departure and arrival, which is a key feature of the New Wave. Its films possess a grotesque ability to, like the motif of the train, traverse physical, temporal and ideological spaces. Girelli follows Hames in edifying this argument when asserting that New Wave directors and screenwriters did not ‘emerge in a cultural vacuum, but were preceded and followed by a number of significant films and filmmakers’ (Girelli, 2011: 51). My argument extends this beyond film and into Czech culture as a whole.

Defused allegory through comedy is a feature of the New Wave outlined earlier by Forman. The stubbornness Kundera describes in relation to the Czech nation is a prominent characteristic of Ludvík in *The Joke*, whose inability to let his own mishaps go drives the plot, while the sense of ‘common assent and cunning’ is a prevalent feature in Forman’s *The Firemen’s Ball* (1967). Forman stated that when Western producer Carlo Ponti saw his film he withdrew funding because he perceived that ‘nobody will go to see this film because it’s making fun of the common man’ (Forman quoted in National Security Archive, 1997). This reaffirms Sviták’s ‘focus on the everyday, laughing at life’ argument in relation to the Czech ‘defence’ Hames alludes to; however, Forman goes on to describe how the non-actors used for the roles of firemen in the film were small-town firemen themselves and that they understood the overt metaphor for bureaucratic authority under Communist rule. Here, Forman makes a clear distinction: if the joke was on the everyday working man – ostensibly the real-life firemen in the cast – then the intellectual would need to hold the ‘secret’ of the metaphor that the apparently blindly acquiescing workingmen play out in order for us to laugh at them. For Forman, this is not the case; the joke is not on the workingmen, it is on the metaphor they wittingly stand for: the overarching system. The fact that collectively the workingmen know this is a part of that ‘common assent and cunning’ Kundera outlines as a key Czech characteristic, and this is a theme reiterated throughout the film.

The close-up shots Forman uses in the large communal space of the ballroom help to generate a sense of intimacy between the characters and the viewer. Panned-out shots could generate a sense of community rather than individuality, whereas the switch to close-ups of individuals generates a more nuanced glance at the characters. Even those who act most foolishly produce sympathy in the viewer when their faces are shown close up and their idiosyncrasies are on show. It is no coincidence here that Forman cast non-actors: their lack of acting skills produces an effect of the ‘real’ within this ‘*trompe l’oeil*’, promoting the

documentary feel but at the same time making the characters easily recognisable and engaging. The self-reflexive aspect of this effect comes with our voyeurism: given the mundane normality of these bundling characters, the viewer is forced to question: what is so worthy of note in watching? If we feel uncomfortable with the fixed gaze on ‘ordinary people’ going about their business, then this question is overlapped when the firemen generate a committee during the ball to officiate over a beauty pageant. This time the viewer shares close-ups ostensibly of young girls, and our gaze is being generated and shared by the gaze of these men. The focus of these everyday men is on the girls’ faces and bodies, judging their appearances and sexual appeal. Our uneasiness with the pageant audition, where we are inside a more confined space than the open ballroom, with a fireman standing guard at the door while a young girl strips to her underwear to be closely examined, acts as a warning that this type of objectification is uncomfortable. The joke here *is* on the firemen, but notably not on any individual fireman, who as committee stand for the metaphor of the authorities; the joke is not on the individuals being watched, nor on the individuals watching, but on a system of authority where a committee can be formed just to look at people. This *trompe l’oeil* self-reflexively denounces the voyeurism involved in watching films, parodying its own theatricality which in turn makes a mockery of the ‘real’ and indicates that the everyday man – whom we see through the close-up shots of the firemen – is not the butt of the joke either, rather it is the collective situation they find themselves in which is to be laughed at: that of the ordinariness of people in the ‘great laboratory of history’ being considered worthy of ‘closely observing’.

REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE

The fetishisation of youth displayed by the firemen is at odds with the sense of youth revolt in the film. Indeed, whilst the girls at first seem to accept their status as objects at this

preliminary audition stage, when it comes to the real thing they run off and the entire structure breaks down. Throughout the film there is this undercurrent of youth rebellion ‘somewhere behind’ which is gnawing away at the rigid structures set up by the authoritarian brigade. Moreover, the metaphor is given added significance with the motif of the fire, an omnipresent danger ‘somewhere behind’ which from the outset we have witnessed the firemen’s inadequacies at dealing with, despite this being their true vocation.

Not only do the close-ups demonstrate looks of disinterest from the youth and mocking of their elders, there are subtle reference points which shift their dynamic: music is central to this in the film. The band at the ball plays a mixture of classic tunes with an almost military-band style, which the opening sequence soundtrack reinforces; however, the same band play renditions of Western pop music in a more jazz and swing style which gets the young people at the ball interested. This shift from the rigidity of structure of playing from a score to the fluidity of the more contemporary music, with its onus on solos and improvisation, represents both a breaking down of the rigid structures of the old at the same time as a literal clinging-on to the same instruments which generate the old sound. Forman’s first film, *The Audition* (*Konkurs*, 1964) is a feature made up of two parts, ‘If Only They Ain’t Had Them Bands’ (*‘Kdyby ty muziky nebyly’*) and the eponymous second section. In the first section, the young male protagonists falter in their discipline to rehearse with their rival brass bands over their desire to watch motorcycle racing, much to the consternation of especially Jan Vostrčil’s character, the non-actor picked up by Forman for the role of band conductor and who also appears as a prominent member of the brigade in *The Firemen’s Ball*. In the second section, the lure for pedicurist Věra Křesadlová (Forman’s future wife) is to sing at an audition in the popular musical style similar to the jazz and swing renditions the youth subscribe to in *The Firemen’s Ball*.

The motif of the motorcycle as a distraction from the rigidity of the ‘old’ structure in the first part and the jazz and swing style in the second point to a site of American culture already present in the consciousness of youth in terms of rebellion, even in the Communist 1960s era. The penchant for motorcycle races reflects the youth revolt in America depicted by James Dean in Nicholas Ray’s *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and relates to the ‘rebellious youth culture that had emerged in Europe and the USA’ in the wake of World War II Girelli highlights (Girelli, 2011: 51). The Audition thus relates to the liminal space between ‘old’ and ‘new’ in relation to youth culture and music in the 1960s. The motif of the still-shot-appearance of trains in motion in *Closely Observed Trains* also acts as an image occupying this liminal space: the train is both a source and a destination, channelled by the media of film – an illusory producer of motion via a series of still images. The train’s movement is largely denoted by its sound, which reverberates with how pop music prompts the youth into action in *The Firemen’s Ball*, and the deluge of what almost looks like fairy dust billowing out of the funnel and onto the screen, illuminating the train as an object shuttling between destination and terminus. The denotation of the train as image in the film resonates in this but Barthes warns that the ‘message cannot be conflated by simple *existence* of the scene’, because the train as liminal object ‘exceeds the copy of the referential motif’, compelling us to closely observe the text (Barthes, 1977: 53).

In *The Firemen’s Ball*, the band strike up a rendition of The Beatles and the youth are prompted into action. As a boy and girl playfully dance together, the girl’s pearl necklace breaks and the pearls disseminate across the floor. As the couple follow the several different paths to gather this once unified structure they are led under a table and engage in some pseudo-sexual activity. This reverberates with the Barthesian textual analysis provided in the explosive, disseminating climax to *Closely Observed Trains*. Youth revolt’s answer to rigid structures is to break them, a flood to wipe out what came before as in the Old Testament

(*Daisies* provides another pertinent example of this) and start again; however, this new start is again coupled with the inescapable old. For Baudrillard:

The phallic fortress offers all the signs of a fortress, that is to say, of weakness. It can defend itself only from the ramparts of a manifest sexuality, of a finality of sex that exhausts itself in reproduction, or in the orgasm (Baudrillard, 1990: 16).

Thus, if male desire exhausts itself at the point of climax, it follows that phallogocentrism does so also. When this desire is obliterated, however, it begins a process of rebuilding until the next ‘finality’ offered to it. In terms of phallogocentric culture, this alludes to the circularity of history. Dissemination, such as with the pearl necklace, is still open to a being pieced back together to at least a likeness of its former structure. This process reflects the resurrection of male desire, and the drive towards a telos comes out in a new wave. The young couple follow one of the pearls representing the dissemination of structure and the result is a fumbling achievement of male desire. Jan Němec’s film *A Report on the Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*, 1966) echoes several of Forman’s themes – the use of non-actors in leading roles being a prominent one. Robert Buchar attests that Němec’s ‘career as a filmmaker was never easy. He always made films that ran into problems . . . [A *Report on the Party and the Guests*] was personally banned by the president and Communist Party chairman, Antonín Novotný’, who named Němec ‘dangerous’ (Buchar, 2004: 2-3), after which he was fired by Barrandov Studios. Peter Hames, however, argues that the film was ‘intended as an exposure of the ruling Mafia that exists in every society . . . references to any specific time and place were deliberately omitted’ (Hames, 2004: 141). Again, the film is afforded the grotesque temporal space which opens it to allegory within any overarching narrative under phallogocentrism – that space occupied by *trompe l’oeil*. The opening scene mirrors *The Firemen’s Ball* in that they both involve groups of people enjoying time off with convivial drinking in open public spaces. In *The Firemen’s Ball*, this space is restricted within the ballroom, whereas the wide-open countryside is the setting in Němec’s film;

however, even this space is to be reduced to an oppressive condition. The group enjoying a picnic in the countryside are also markedly younger than the firemen and, mirroring the youth in quiet revolt in Forman's film, contain a mixture of males and females. Indeed, the prominent figure in the opening scene is Eva (Zdena Škvorecká), a non-actor whose profession was in fact a writer. This adds a metafictional layer in relation to the crossing over between 'real' and 'fiction' which is a prominent theme in the New Wave, and Škvorecká's true vocation points to a female participation in the construction of narratives which is rejected by the older generation – the older generation whose objectification of the young girls in *The Firemen's Ball* demonstrates an attitude of how women are supposed to act.

Eva, again echoing the youth in Forman's film, says 'there is nothing better than improvisation' (Němec, 2007). Like the jazz and swing music, which prompts the youth into action, improvisation marks a disregarding of strict structures pertaining to 'old'. The group, however, are incongruous with their setting: with their formal attire and bourgeois tastes, they are out of kilter with their overtly natural environment. The countryside acts as a retreat from the city, but there is something funny about the sight of the women bathing in the river in full make-up and undergarments, and the collision between the natural water and *Eau de parfum* again marks a disjoint between the natural and the bourgeois, with the former being commercialised by the latter in this product.

The uneasiness of these characters in this setting is deepened by the arrival of a group of official-looking men led by an odious trickster named Rudolf (Jan Klusák). Like Kundera, Rudolf plays the role of fool and uses it to get away with all manner of pranks. The bourgeois group's playground in their natural retreat has been overtaken by another group, who set up a game which mirrors the mock trials of the totalitarian state. The distinction between humour and seriousness is again uncertain in the term 'mock', with the uneasy atmosphere of being out of place deepened by the disjoint between the literal arrival of the bureau in the country

setting. The two henchman struggle to settle the desk on the unstable ground, realise they have placed it back to front, turn it around and then fix stones to its feet to steady it before Rudolf takes his seat behind it. The fool then proceeds, in a more formal and registered tone, to mock the ‘guests’, causing his cronies to laugh; yet this laughter is uneasy and cynical. The feeling is like that of the pageant audition in *The Firemen’s Ball*, where the wide-open setting has been constricted to this ‘stage’, where imaginary boundaries have been drawn to place the guests into cells, thus reducing the space, even in this wide-open setting. Again, Rudolf mocks the obvious uneasiness, asking ironically: ‘So, do you like it here? Nice countryside, eh?’ (Němec, 2007) As in *The Firemen’s Ball*, where the pageant, tombola and prize-giving ceremony are reduced to farce, the adding of structure here by means of imaginary cells marked out by lines in the gravel are eventually dismissed by František (Pavel Bošek) who has clearly taken a dislike to Rudolf and his games, where he is genially telling a farcical narrative of how the key to these imaginary cells got lost.

As in *The Firemen’s Ball*, the reduction of space to conduct business ‘privately’ here mirrors the pageant audition, and acts as a visual representation of the theme of the breakdown between public and private in *Closely Observed Trains*. This breakdown is demonstrated when one of the female guests declares she needs to go to the bathroom, and is promptly escorted by two henchmen. This is an instance of the natural being conditioned and supervised by the authorities which jars with the wide-open setting, bringing the walls in closer through mise en abyme on the characters as in the Kundera-esque ‘disappearing poem’. This constriction is reinforced when the host (Ivan Vyskočil) arrives and puts an end to the farce. As they walk together he announces his plans for the setting, to turn it into his own playground with a stage and swimming pool – an announcement which shatters the notion of the setting as a public space, again blurring the lines between public and private.

After the host's intervention, Karel (Karel Mareš) cannot resist the urge to offer his disdain for Rudolf's actions, despite the connection the host has mentioned to him as his 'adopted' son. This flagrant dissent again feels uncomfortable, with the undercurrent of untrustworthiness surrounding the situation deepened by mise en abyme, with characters played by non-actors and characters playing other roles within the film creating a kind of masquerade where no one can be trusted at face value. Karel's protestations have a Kafkaesque nature, feeling slighted by impersonal forces outwith his control that he cannot help but take personally; yet what the association with mock trials demonstrates is that opposition to the authorities is the 'crime' being targeted. Karel's actions incriminate him in a Kafkaesque manner since we are witnessing the punishment finding the crime – by objecting to his treatment, Karel is justifying that very treatment, thus he is generating a sense of being partly responsible for it.

One way Karel shows dissent during Rudolf's game is by ignoring the imaginary boundaries of his cell and walking straight through them to head in the opposite direction holding his partner's tasselled handbag. Rudolf quickly springs to action and sends his henchmen to catch up with him and rough him up a little; meanwhile, Rudolf cuts the tassels off the bag in a moment of seeming impunity. Yet this moment inversely reflects youth revolt in *The Firemen's Ball*, where the breaking of the girl's necklace marks a breaking of rigid structures. Here, Rudolf's actions do the opposite, by breaking the structure which marks the bag as 'different', he 'normalizes' it – his petty actions have the effect of reducing expression in a manner which preludes the actions of the Soviet army following the 1968 invasion – indeed, this is the very point where normality resumes with the arrival of the host.

The host puts an end to the charade, telling Rudolf to stop and to apologise, declaring: 'It all happened practically in my own home. This will be a playing field' (Němec, 2007). Here the host reinforces the breakdown between public and private: his home is spread to the

countryside and his plans for the setting are to manipulate it into his own private space. The demand to stop the game, in this sense, is an empty one, since he continues to proliferate the same kind of breakdown Rudolf and his gang were performing. This empty rhetoric again is mirrored in *The Firemen's Ball*. The firemen constantly utter empty phrases designed to uphold the brigade. Indeed, when the elder firemen, Josef (Josef Kolb), is farcically revealed as the one who stole the brawn from the tombola, the firemen's reaction is not one of disdain for the act of stealing, but for the act of honesty which could disgrace the brigade, prompting one of his colleagues to rant: 'The upholding of the brigade is far more important than some stupid honesty! (Forman, c2009)'

The crossing-over between honesty and virtue deepens the sense of masquerade, and points to how the supposedly normalising effect of the host's arrival has not in fact removed the atmosphere of distrust. With the appearance of virtue, the host controls his guests and is uneasy at the thought of anyone not playing by the rules, even when at the banquet the rule is to enjoy oneself. Again, a source for control is empty rhetoric, and the ability to divide and conquer by turning the guests against one another. By employing Josef (Jiří Němec), the guest with a 'gift for oration', to his side at the banquet, the host is deploying a power tool to usher control. When the guest makes a speech to his friends, they are convivially encouraged to go and find František (Pavel Bošek) who has absconded. In a mask of virtue, this is to uphold harmony, but the baying hounds and rifles suggest something more sinister. The idiom of stealing as a virtue comes full circle to the overt metaphor of dog-eat-dog, with the film closing with the dogs' barking sending an ominous signal as for the dissident's outcome. As with the didactic, anti-dissidence message being retained in *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, the ominous conclusion here again sends out a stark warning against this kind of action. The difference is that the film is open-ended; the baying hounds and the barking after the end credits stretches the open-ending 'outside' the narrative of the film. The warning in this sense

is that the hounds are at the door for the viewer, and that this reality extends beyond perceived ‘beginnings’ and ‘endings’. Again, the strength of the film is in its rejection of a defined history. As Hames suggests, the metaphor could be applied to the ‘ruling Mafia’ of any time, not just to Communism.

SUMMARY

One of the key concerns of this thesis is to do with the treatment of the Czechoslovak New Wave as an isolated occurrence. This chapter has sought a consideration of the overlap between films and filmmakers coming before the New Wave, leading to those who continued to work after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968. The purpose of this is to highlight how New Wave films present characters who deal with their own oppression in ways which has the effect of adding to their, or their close counterparts’, sense of being oppressed. By considering these overlaps, the idea of the New Wave being an anti-establishment movement targeting the Communist regime is challenged and an overlap between compliance and defiance can be found. This grotesque overlap is brought out in the darkly comic trope of the movement. The sense of borders in a state of flux these overlaps generate is magnified in the next chapter, which deals with films made on the hinge of the Prague Spring and the beginning of the Normalization period.

CHAPTER TWO: A VERY WILLING PUPPET

ON THE CUSP OF A WAVE

The liminal space Czechoslovakia seemed to occupy for much of the twentieth century is felt deeply in Juraj Herz's haunting psychological thriller *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1969). The parallels to be drawn between the film's setting, which spans the Nazi invasion of 1939, and the contextual setting of the film's production, which spanned the Soviet-led invasion of 1968, helps to generate a great satirical potency within this narrative. This potency in relation to the central New Wave concern of borders in a state of flux, however, appears to have been overlooked by Daniel Bird, who laments that:

Herz's 'Czech' films are generally disassociated from the New Wave, for, on the one hand, the emergence of Herz as a major filmmaker came after the Prague Spring with the release of *Spalovač mrtvol* in 1969, and, on the other hand, his work lacks the political bite of, for example, Jan Němec or Věra Chytilová's films, favouring, as the Czech author Josef Škvorecký puts it, the 'time machine' or period drama (Bird, 2002).

While it is true that Herz emerged onto the scene after the generally agreed period of the Czechoslovak New Wave – and that, like his contemporary, Jan Švankmajer, his education in the puppetry faculty as opposed to film and television at FAMU positioned him as a kind of 'outsider' – there are features of *The Cremator* which reflect the New Wave phenomenon and the grotesque in the film heightens this sense of overlap. Its depiction of a society on an ideological hinge, with the Nazis on the Czech borders, in relation to its production spanning the Warsaw Pact invasion also gives it great 'political bite', in opposition to Bird's statement about Herz's work as 'period drama'. This is surely a grave oversight and seems to miss the point of the New Wave, especially given how allegory through old settings helps to promote metafictional nuances which illuminate as *trompe l'oeil* the satirical effect of parodying life's theatricality.

As previous chapters have demonstrated, not only does a setting deflecting the contemporary political situation allow for its production under censorship, the space for

allegory it provides gives the text a relevance stretching beyond its own historical context.

Indeed, the central character in *The Cremator* embodies many of the central themes of the New Wave films according to Karel Kosík, whom Peter Hames quotes as stating that:

cinema was attacking the existing bureaucratic regime in its core and essence. But this was not achieved by direct attacks on the government and veiled political allusion but by emphasising ‘such basic aspects of human existence as the grotesque, the tragic, the absurd, death, laughter, conscience and moral responsibility’ (Kosík quoted in Hames, 2004: 140).

These are all concerns focused on throughout this study in relation to the New Wave films: in particular, the sense of the grotesque and of *différance* (where the lines between the tragic and the comic, death and laughter, the absurd and the serious, become blurry). In terms of *différance*, Herz’s temporal positioning ‘outside’ the New Wave, as Bird suggests, or more accurately on its latter cusp, has the effect of heightening its relevance to the New Wave concerns of the grotesque and liminality, deepening our understanding of the concept. The production of *The Cremator* occupies a grotesque position in temporal terms, with its filming being interrupted by the Soviet invasion of 1968. The effects of Normalization naturally took time to be enforced, with Herz’s work thus situated in a liminal space much like with Němec’s *A Report on the Party and the Guests*. *The Cremator* follows the trend for New Wave figures in collaboration, with prominent New Wave director Jiří Menzel cast in the role of Mr Dvořák. The intertexting with the New Wave and more specifically Menzel’s seminal work, *Closely Observed Trains*, is presented in this character’s relationship with Miloš Hrma, albeit with far less of a central focus. Like Miloš, Dvořák acts as a character entering the central setting of the film in tandem with the viewer, with his tour of *The Crematorium* providing the viewer an intimate glance at the central environment. The central figure, Karl Kopfrkingl (Rudolf Hrušínský), also mirrors Miloš as the New Wave paradigm of anti-hero, albeit a far more sinister version. With the viewer’s shared position with Dvořák, Kopfrkingl’s sinister nature is allowed to be felt in spite of the character’s dominance over

the narrative and his delusions of grandeur. Kopfrkingl's preoccupation with his understudy's incessant smoking as a sign of 'being nervous' demonstrates Dvořák's perception of his grotesque mentor. This sense of foreboding is a central feature of the film, and Dvořák's fate plays a significant role in this.

A MADMAN'S LOGIC

With New Wave intertexting and the overlapping of cast, crew and actors and non-actors, Kopfrkingl's assertion in the opening sequence that 'we judge others, reproach them, but what about us? (Herz, 2006)' continues the thread of the uncertainty over where to apportion in relation to holding up a mirror to the Czechoslovak New Wave. The blurring of the lines between actors and non-actors, characters and the real, develops the theme of the difficulty of distinguishing who is in which role in Pirandellian fashion. In relation to *The Earlier* point about the sense of these films pointing to the actions of some 'other' with a horrifying realisation that 'they' are in fact 'us', again *The Cremator* ponders the Kafkaesque sense of being slighted by external forces but somehow feeling responsible for them. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead discusses the Pirandellian automaton as possessing the kind of grace man has lost since 'eating from the tree of knowledge' (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 13). Radcliff-Umstead attests that 'man would have to become a god to retain the original charm' (Ibid), raising the possibility of the Barthesian Author-God who writes his own history and this is something Kopfrkingl tries to achieve against the tide of history in *The Cremator*. As Hames argues, Kopfrkingl is 'opposed to suffering which he believes should have no role in the modern humanitarian state' (Hames, 2009: 107); yet he occupies a world where 'only a madman can remain with some form of control' (Ibid). While Kopfrkingl sermonises on his opposition to suffering, his imposition of suffering on his own family and acceptance of his role in the grand narrative of the Holocaust suggests a deep paradox in this regard. To suggest

that ‘only a madman can remain’ in control, Hames is feeding the argument that Kopfrkingl is a well-intentioned (as his overbearing commentary on the film tries to convey) man who descends into madness (as the cinematography implies with the use of a fishbowl lens portraying a grotesque version of Kopfrkingl on screen). However, this would be letting him off rather too easily. Elsewhere, Hames describes *The Cremator* as having an ability to be interpreted as a ‘criticism of collaboration’ where Kopfrkingl ‘becomes a willing tool of the occupying force’ (Hames, 2005: 224) which correctly implies greater agency to acquiesce the invading forces’ will. Hames argues that the film can also be interpreted as ‘a criticism of the Czech tradition of survival at any cost’ (Hames, 2005: 224), which is more satisfactory in providing Kopfrkingl with a more nuanced character than merely a madman on the rampage.

Radcliff-Umstead calls the ‘crisis in today’s [1967] theatre’ that of man’s inability to ‘reach the divine infinite consciousness’ (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 13). In terms of phallogocentric culture, the ‘end of culture’ would mark the end of male desire in the Baudrillardian sense; what the series of new ideologies, ‘new waves’ and resurrections in history demonstrate is that in deferring access to the final signified of culture, or as Radcliff-Umstead describes it, the ‘divine infinite consciousness’, phallogocentrism is able to reside after each flood has swept away the conditions left by the previous wave of ideology.

The ‘old’ Nazi theme in *The Cremator* is a potent parallel to the film’s external context of the impending Soviet invasion, as well as providing, similarly to *Closely Observed Trains*, an old setting which acts as a means of circumventing censorship laws. These parallels transplant the ‘new’ political situation onto ‘old’ settings. This grotesque overlapping, underlined by the overlapping of New Wave films and directors, edifies the stage of the New Wave as a carnivalesque arena where subverting the contemporary is disguisedly open. In relation to Kundera and the idea of the court jester, this platform in its grotesque nature deflects ‘blame’ from the proponents of the New Wave by shifting the

perception of who is on the butt end of the joke. Yet what haunts this carnival is the grotesque feeling Kopfrkingl hones into: ‘We judge others, reproach them, but what about us? (Herz, 2006)’ Kopfrkingl’s duplicity in the film projects an anxiety over the fact that these New Wave critiques are in some way a product of the establishment, since the industry is controlled by the authorities. Like Kopfrkingl, there must be a degree of towing the party line for self-promotion which is at odds with any tone of dissent.

The grotesque foreboding in *The Cremator* affects the viewer’s judgement over these kinds of questions concerning blame: on the one hand we are witnessing the deplorable actions of a serial killer bent on murdering his own family, yet there is also a strong sense of Kopfrkingl’s descent into madness. This must be considered as at least partly down to the impending Nazi invasion, and the effects it will have on Kopfrkingl and his family, and appears to mitigate his actions somewhat. Kopfrkingl cannot help feeling personally slighted by great, impersonal forces outwith his control, yet what the Kafkaesque explores is the idea of somehow feeling responsible for this oppression. This point is salvaged in our treatment of Kopfrkingl: he must be considered at least partly responsible even for this psychological descent. As a kind of puppet-automaton, Kopfrkingl demonstrates the Pirandellian ‘tragic dichotomy between an individual’s longing for complete freedom and the forms of life which society imposes upon him’ (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 16). The paradox of the ‘individual’ and his own dichotomy being ‘tragic’ again invokes this hinge between the tragic and the comic, and there is no doubt something funny, both strange and humorous, about Kopfrkingl. Radcliff-Umstead goes on to argue that ‘Pirandello views Hamlet as the modern hero paralyzed by superior forces. The Pirandellian hero will be forced into a puppet’s impotence’ (*Ibid.*). In terms of phallogocentrism, this impotence marks an inability to sustain a new erection, a resurrection or a ‘new wave’; Miloš Hroma is one New Wave anti-hero who suffers from this affliction and it drives him towards life’s true telos in his suicide bid. As Radcliff-

Umstead suggests, this is a consequence of the ‘crisis’ of the 1960s where man finds he is unable to reach the ‘divine consciousness’, which will provide him with ‘total freedom’. Kopfrkingl, conversely, is determined to negotiate the conditions which obstruct his path towards this imagined divine consciousness by accepting the latest ‘new wave’ of Nazi ideology. Like in Miloš Forman’s *The Firemen’s Ball*, the central characters of *The Cremator* are everyday working men, a feature which is again reflected in how ‘time and again Pirandello focuses on characters like clerks, teachers, civil servants and small-time businessmen since their professions depend on social appearances and ceremonies’ (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 16). Not only does this resonate with the New Wave, but also with the Kafkaesque (Land Surveyor K., Josef K., Gregor Samsa).

The film’s motif of a spectre looming, somewhere behind, always on the periphery, always threatening, is a central concern for Kopfrkingl, whose wife Dagmar (Vlasta Chramostová) is half-Jewish. The opening sequence marks the spot where Kopfrkingl met his ‘little angel’ at the lion’s cage in the zoo, where the big cats creeping around mirror the concern of being hunted felt in the looming Nazi invasion in the film, and the looming Soviet invasion on its production. This scene reverberates with Antonín J. Liehm when he argues that New Wave filmmakers ‘candidly and without self-censorship’ described a ‘landscape full of lions and many white spots on the map of recent Czech history’ (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2). The presence of these inhibiting, dangerous forces, however, remain ‘somewhere behind’. Despite the tempering of the danger afforded by the cats being caged off, the feeling is uneasy, with random flashes of body parts developing an undercurrent of danger and heightening the sense of the grotesque.

This fencing-off danger reverberates with the narratorial effect of a kind of ‘period drama’, which distances the New Wave from its contemporary radicalism, with the film set not only ‘pre-communism’, but pre-Nazi as well. This distance, of the action taking place

‘somewhere behind’, generates a false sense of security mirrored by these wild animals. The contextual situation of the Soviet army on Czechoslovakia’s doorstep demonstrates how this danger is omnipresent, always ‘somewhere behind’: should the bars separating two sides somehow be brought down anarchy will break loose. The feeling of being hunted haunts Kopfrkingl, who acts as if nothing is happening and claims that he relishes in the hunt.

Despite noticing how ‘quiet’ his wife is growing as the Nazi juggernaut gains momentum in the film, it would be naive to suggest that Kopfrkingl’s concerns are his only motivations for his actions, despite his self-styled image as devoted family man, one he professes to his Jewish confidant Dr Bettelheim (Eduard Kohout) during one of his many visits for blood tests. This duplicity is eventually revealed in relation to these tests when he visits a brothel he is clearly well acquainted with. This moment unveils one of the many masks Kopfrkingl wears, another motif of Pirandellism where the heroes ‘like to construct for themselves a social puppet mask’ (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 18). This moment reveals his true motivations behind his preoccupation with the health of his blood, despite his doctor’s reassurance that if he is the faithful husband he purports to be there is no need for the regularity of his testing.

Their discussions on blood, infection and death in Bettelheim’s surgery act as the underlying metaphor in the film. Bettelheim attests that ‘blood is always the same, just like your ashes’ (Herz, 2006), when Kopfrkingl asks if it is possible to determine his German traces. This anxiety, however, is of being found out: what if they detect Jewish blood? What if there is no German blood? What if they detect venereal disease? Of these concerns, the only scientifically viable possibility is to uncover his unfaithfulness to his wife should he contract an infection; ironically, the Aryan metanarrative which will condemn Bettelheim does not stand up to scientific scrutiny. This narrative is thus one Kopfrkingl can boycott for his own personal gain.

Kopfrkingl's well-masked unfaithfulness to his wife is a key marker of the level of duplicity he is capable of and his ability to disguise it. He is aware the impending invasion on the Czechoslovak borders is not only a physical one, but an ideological one. He listens to those in prominent positions around him spurting Nazi rhetoric and his perception towards his own – however tenuous – Germanic background alters, as does his attitude to the Jews he employs: Bettelheim and those working under him at the crematorium, and even his wife. As the Nazi imperative for disconnecting from Jews increases, Kopfrkingl is only too willing to throw those closest to him under the bus.

For Kopfrkingl, whom we receive much of the narrative from in a hybrid of dialogue, soliloquy and overdub, the obvious concerns he faces are in providing for his family by keeping his job and protecting them from harm. He has already hinted at his doubling techniques in the face of adversity: by providing his wife her alter-ego 'Lakmé' to conceal her background; by honing in on the 'German blood' narrative first given to him by his Teutophile Great War-comrade Reinke. Yet the hybridized narratorial technique points to one of the Kafkaesque effects of this 'somewhere behind' dilemma: Kopfrkingl's concerns reach beyond the plight of his loved ones; it is not enough to want to keep his job, his bourgeois tastes dictate that he must earn more money and his desire for power dictates that he must climb the employment ladder. These selfish concerns are at odds with any notion of sacrifice made on his part in the annihilation of his own family. Kopfrkingl sermonises on releasing poor souls from their misery: 'We must alleviate man's suffering. The sooner he is set free, transformed, reincarnated, the better (Herz, 2006).' This acts as a move to mitigate his murderous actions. Yet, as in the theatre of Pirandello, 'every man . . . has his puppet-mask to defend. Society forces one to be a mask of himself. This type of dramatic hero justifies himself with a puppet logic constructed' (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 19). Indeed, even the apparent descent into madness proposes to mitigate his actions; however, with the heavy onus

on the grotesque in the film, and the sense of borders in a state of flux, nothing is to be taken for granted. These fluctuations are at the heart of the trademark ‘dark-humour’ of the New Wave. Radcliff-Umstead describes humour as the ‘tightrope between the comic and the sad’ and argues that the ‘humoristic artist . . . will strip away the puppet’s mask of logic’ (Radcliff-Umstead, 1967: 19). This Pirandellian effect of the New Wave, of stripping away apparent logic through humour, is felt from Kafka to the modern day – as will be explored in the next chapter.

The grotesque nature of humour in *The Cremator* is brought out through the motif of the dark-haired woman as a spectre haunting Kopfrkingl, which both signifies his mask of madness (apparently brought on by the crisis of the impending invasion and its inevitable effects on him and his family) as well as his guilt. Kopfrkingl knows that his half-Jewish wife will provide an obstacle for his social elevation following Nazi invasion; if he is to survive this new flood of ideology he will have to break free from this obstacle. Thus, this spectre marks his premeditated plan to remove this obstruction, hinted at throughout via the grotesque foreboding of the iron bar as murder weapon; of telling his ‘little angel’ he would like to hang her up on the Christmas tree; of his son’s effeminacy and lack of German teaching and Aryan inadequacies. When he is wearing his Czech nationalist mask during the first meal with Reinke and his family, Kopfrkingl admits that even his book on Tibet, which he carries around like a bible, is in Czech. During this meeting, Kopfrkingl expresses a resistance to the German invasion which is at odds with his guest. Reinke asserts that the German nation ‘suffered great injustice after the war; anyone with German blood should fight to put things right’. When this is not met with agreement, Mrs Reinke suggests that the Kopfrkingls ‘perhaps have a different opinion’, to which Dagmar snaps: ‘Our children go to Czech schools’ (Herz, 2006). The conclusion of the conversation is made by Reinke, who unequivocally states that ‘the Republic is an obstacle in our path’, a suggestion that parallels

how Kopfrkingl's family are an obstacle in his path. Reinke's suggestion points to seeing the Republic consumed by the Nazi juggernaut which if followed will see Kopfrkingl's family suffer the same fate. The success of this rhetoric filtering through to Kopfrkingl, who clearly looks up to Reinke as a man of high social standing and in a position to climb the social ladder should Nazi occupation occur, is suggested in how the scene overlaps into one where only the Kopfrkingls are seated at the table.

This overlapping of scenes is a key motif in the film, where the flux in boundaries mirrors the socio-political situation both in the film's setting and in its production. This self-reflexivity is a trope of the New Wave, where non-actors take up prominent roles in films, directors come on stage, settings are made ambiguous and time overlaps in a disorientating carnival designed to question the current narrative at the same time as demonstrating how the apparently 'new' is always connected with the 'old' in Barthesian fashion. Here, Kopfrkingl is keeping up to date with current affairs in the newspaper; however, his interests are not on the profound political situation surrounding them but on a grotesque story about a girl born with two heads and four arms and legs. He turns to his son Mili (Miloš Vognič) and tells him that he should seek to improve his German at school. The two heads in the article belonging to one person invokes the idea of the double and duplicity, and here we see Kopfrkingl doubling in the face of adversity. Having just offered some kind of opposition to his friend Reinke and the prospect of buying into the German narrative at the very same setting, he is now acquiescing with the German slant with his instructions to Mili. The newspaper report is also an allusion to Buddhism and, in particular, the nickname Kopfrkingl gives to his wife.

Lakmé was the title of a nineteenth-century opera set in British-India by Léo Delibes. The name derived from Lakshmi, Buddhist goddess of fortune and beauty. The ambiguity in relation to the term 'fortune' here drives at the duplicitous nature of Kopfrkingl – his desires to provide for his family, control their fortunes and alleviate their prosperity are driven by a

bourgeois, material lust for capitalist ‘fortunes’ masked by this spirituality he professes. His duplicity is hinted at in his reaction to the girl in the article, whom he describes as a ‘poor soul’ with a ‘life twice blessed’ – this oxymoronic sentiment highlighting the incongruity of his duplicitous nature, which seems to propel his psychological descent into madness with as much force as the external forces outwith his control.

MASK OF OBJECTIVITY

This first-person technique offers a privileged access to Kopfrkingl’s sense of self-knowledge (and self-deceit) in a mask of objectivity. At times, when the shots appear to be from Kopfrkingl’s perspective, it is uncertain whether his streams of consciousness are heard only in his head or are uttered aloud for others to hear. The narrative’s objectivity is thus reduced by Kopfrkingl’s intrusion on it, and this mirrors the insidious introduction of the Nazi-Aryan narrative on the characters in the film. Kopfrkingl, meanwhile, is obsessed with Tibetan Buddhism and makes speeches on this subject throughout. The humour generated in the absurdity of this rhetoric reflects his ability to swallow a ‘foreign’ metanarrative and use it to his own ends; sermonising on the ethics of a euthanasia-like virtue in releasing souls from the torture of existence to be reincarnated in the afterlife also chips at the notion of ‘new’ in rebirth and, like the allusion to the cyclical nature of the seasons in the term ‘Prague Spring’, points to the circularity of phallogocentric culture. This circularity of existence, of reincarnation, begs the question: if life is so unbearable, what is so ethical about being born back into it? For Kopfrkingl, this notion acts as mitigation against his own actions in a manner which reflects the Nazi metanarrative of Aryanism. The arbitrariness of the gatekeepers of this type of metanarrative (in religion be it Jews, Christians, Buddhists; politically the Nazis, Soviets) is reflected again in a comic moment in the film. Kopfrkingl, buoyed by his improved personal wealth, decides to buy a portrait to furnish his home. The

ludicrousness of it being Emelian Chamarro, president of Nicaragua, and Kopfrkingl's insistence that it is in fact Louis Marin, former Comptroller General, mocks the emptiness of this gesture, providing a sense of foreboding to the obligatory portraits of the Führer in such homes following Nazi occupation. Kopfrkingl's blasé willingness to perform such empty gestures points to his actions as mere gesturing and in doing so weakens his apparently sincere convictions of freeing souls and Buddhist faith.

While Kopfrkingl's duplicity in the film is partly a consequence of these external forces outwith his control, there is also a grotesque sense of self-determination which is reinforced by the Pirandellian ambiguity over puppets in the film. There is a puppet-like quality to Hrušínský's depiction of Kopfrkingl, with his over-determined facial expressions mirrored by his fixed hairstyle which he constantly checks with his comb. His slow, almost gracefully-sweeping movements add to this sense, yet it is his actions which metaphorically emphasise this puppet-like characteristic. Kopfrkingl is not only willing to swing like a puppet in whichever direction he is instructed to by the overarching authorities and his friends in prominent social standing, but his over-determination to implement the Nazi narrative by murdering his own family generates the kind of comic efficiency Bergson outlines in relation to caricature. For Bergson, humour derives from a 'lack of elasticity of mind' (Bergson, 1999: 27-8), while the 'body reminds us of a mere machine' (Bergson, 1999: 32). Kopfrkingl's lack of elasticity over the Aryan doctrine and his puppet-machine-like quality thus again adheres to the 'dark-humour' trope of the New Wave.

What the wax-work show at the carnival Kopfrkingl and his family visit hints at, however, is a grotesque self-determination in relation to this puppet-state. There is the Kafkaesque sense that whilst external forces (metaphorically the puppeteer; in *mise en abyme*, the film's director Herz) partly controls the character's movements, the puppets/actors have agency over their own actions in a manner which denies them a full

admonishment of guilt. With the director 'pulling the strings' in the film, the mise en abyme effect here is with regards to how the authorities pull the directors' strings, and this generates subversion by separating fact from fiction: you can laugh at the film, but the real-life implications are not so funny; the film is thus almost prophetic with regards to what happens when the 'real' Soviet invasion comes and the film is banned 'forever'.

This tragic/comic overlap is produced in the wake of Kopfrkingl's first murder. The domestic cat acts as a metaphor for the wild cats at the zoo, domesticated and invited into the family home. In the first scene the big cats' threat is diminished by being caged; however, the underlying sense of threat is retained. By placing this symbol inside the Kopfrkingl home, in the exaggeratedly pacified guise of the domestic cat, still produces the foreboding of an underlying sense of threat, which is brought out in this first murder scene. The extended metaphor is the feeling of being hunted even in your own home, as Dagmar is subjected to by her husband; as Czechs are by oppressing forces. Thus, there is something funny, in the unusual sense, about the aftermath of Dagmar's murder by hanging in their bathroom, Kopfrkingl's favourite room in their home, when the tassels on her shoe are toyed with by this docile cat. This motif of the big cats 'somewhere behind' is planted on the domestic scene in the form of the small, domestic cat: a metaphor for the small Czech (like the clerk, social servant, or indeed cremator). The mise-en-abyme effect of big cat 'somewhere behind' in relation to this demonstrates a filtering process in the Kopfrkingl home which places blame far closer to home than Kopfrkingl would like us to believe.

Indeed, in the lead up to the deed, as viewer we are placed on Kopfrkingl's shoulder for his 'hunt'. Posited within another uneasy dining scene in their home, we are made aware of how the children have been sent away to their aunt's so they can be alone. Dagmar, however, demonstrates a lack of appetite which her husband picks up on and reveals to the viewer. As the camera angle rests with Kopfrkingl, his words become a running commentary

as he pursues his clearly ill-at-ease wife. There is a perceptibly fearful look on Dagmar's face as she scarpers away in mild panic, dropping her apron as her husband moves in before she closes the bedroom door on him. The fluidity with regards to borders suggested throughout the film is emphasised here when Kopfrkingl simply brushes aside his wife's closed door, bursting in on her and declaring: 'I'm going to be promoted to the post of director' at the crematorium (Herz, 2006). The dilemma of 'fortune' suggested in Kopfrkingl's pet-name for his wife seems weighted heavily on his own personal fortunes with this statement: Kopfrkingl has previously been warned that his half-Jewish wife will 'stand in the way' of any promotion, so this declaration has grave implications for Dagmar, who is now dressed in black, mute, and mirroring the spectre of the woman in black: a grotesque, foregone conclusion.

When he exits the steaming bathroom after murdering his wife, the comic tone is heightened by his adornment in a bathrobe set like a Tibetan monk or Roman emperor. Given his own self-styled pseudonym 'Roman' and his Buddhist sermonising, this conflict of the duty of the monk and the status of power of the Roman emperor is reflected in his literal doubling on screen, which also signifies his complete descent into madness. 'The Dalai Llama has died,' he announces, as this comical dichotomy plays out. 'Now, at least, we have found a great leader,' he continues, after his ruthless carrying out of the Aryan narrative (Herz, 2006).

Kopfrkingl is purporting a devotion to a leader: the latest figurehead of the overarching narrative he can arbitrarily pay credence to, in an ironic nod to the Führer. The arbitrariness of this 'leader' is reflected in the portrait of the president of Nicaragua he hangs in his living room: Kopfrkingl is willing to ingest any narrative, to kneel at any altar, so long as his own rise to power can be facilitated within it; in other words, he is willing to become part of the external forces oppressing him and become part of the system of oppression,

generating his own Kafkaesque guilt. There is a connection to be made in this exaggerated example of a character willing to work the system to sustain their own personal success with Otakar Vávra's career, and the aforementioned criticism Vávra suggests is levelled at him for facilitating the Normalization period in particular. The implications of this are part of Liehm's call to hold up a mirror to the Normalization period, reflecting where blame really lies: much closer to home than the so-called 'victims' of oppression might wish to believe.

Kopfrkingl's desire to gain power under the 'new' political system is underlined at his wife's funeral – his first presided over as director of the crematorium – where he relishes in his new role. His commentary-like sermonising throughout the film on the virtues of the crematorium are a reflection of his belief in his own skills as orator, where his Buddhist rhetoric is designed to mitigate actions and to persuade his audience that these are virtuous. With his sermonising in the pulpit of the crematorium, his speeches mimic Nazi rallies and the depiction of Adolf Hitler, with his rise to near frenzy and spurring of ideological rubric again providing some dark humour. This extends the metaphor of the doubling of the Buddhist monk and Roman emperor – on the one hand Kopfrkingl is presenting himself within a supposedly virtuous narrative and on the other hand as a great leader. Furthermore, he again uses rhetoric as a defence against his deplorable actions: 'Death can be a blessing when it saves us from suffering. It can spare us the anxieties, the terrors which might await us'. The emptiness of his rhetoric, reflective of the rhetoric spouted by Hitler, is revealed when he repeats the sweet nothing he whispered in his wife's ear before killing her: 'We must make sacrifices. Nothing is certain in this life, except death' – a phrase he has used several times in the film and one which points to the only true telos for man in death (Herz, 2006).

There is an inherent ambiguity in Kopfrkingl's phrase which signifies it as empty rhetoric: 'nothing' is certain in life, a phrase he uses as a sweet 'nothing'. The problem with maintaining the lie is one Kopfrkingl has been struggling to implement in the film, where

despite his heavy presence in the narrative, the seemingly crumbling structure of the film reflects his struggle to keep up the pretence and maintain his big lie. The consequences awaiting Kopfrkingl's family have reached a point of no return by the time he murders Dagmar, thus his lie can no longer be maintained. His next actions are to continue the annihilation of his family as a consequence.

As his funeral speech delves deeper into Nazi rhetoric, half of the funeral guests get up and leave while the other half ecstatically rise to their feet offering Nazi salutes and screaming 'Heil', as the spectre appears and the tragic Dagmar's coffin descends on the catafalque with the scene descending into darkly-comic farce. This hinge between the comic and the tragic plays out in Dagmar's descent to the furnace which will 'release her soul from the suffering of this world': a metaphor for the Kunderaesque laughing in the face of adversity (Herz, 2006).

CRUMBLING BORDERS

Following all the foreboding of this killing in the film, with the breakthrough having been made, Kopfrkingl is expedited into the role of murderer and then mass-murderer. With the scene switching from his 'temple of death' to the brothel he frequently visits, suddenly the doors of the brothel which create 'private' spaces for public consumption sit carelessly ajar. These are the borders behind which Kopfrkingl has been hiding and his wife's removal has allowed him to take off this mask; his implementation of the Nazi metanarrative has pushed him closer to the 'absolute freedom' he yearns for. Again, there are reflections of the boundaries between public and private being abandoned as in *Closely Observed Trains* in relation to sexual encounters. Kopfrkingl is sitting in a room with a prostitute with the door open, chatting to Reinke who is also engaged in this practise in an adjacent room. Like the scene where Miloš peeps into the train carriage where the German soldiers are being

rewarded for their efforts by the nurses, this scene demonstrates how the spoils are shared between party members without the shame of having to hide their actions.

Yet this utopian island, removed from the tracks and oppression of the overarching narrative, does not last long. Reinke, the harbinger of the Nazi narrative, provides further warning to Kopfrkingl about his 'effeminate' son Mili, and this acts as a catalyst for his subsequent actions. Kopfrkingl, enjoying the hedonistic liberties of being allowed to take his women (despite earlier assertions that there was only one for him), to drink (despite earlier assertions of being a teetotaler) and to *Smoke* (despite his apparent disgust at this earlier in the film), is forced to brutally carry out the directions of the overarching narrative in order to stay in touch with these desires. The boys' club feeling of belonging to the party propels Kopfrkingl to not only abandon his family-man image, but to destroy it.

Heeding Reinke's warnings over Mili, Kopfrkingl lures his son to the crematorium with the intention of killing him and hiding the body there. Yet still consumed with how he is perceived by others and desperate to keep up the pretence, he does not want to be seen in the act by his son, instructing him to remove his glasses to clean them before thrusting the iron bar onto his skull and killing him. He then places Mili's corpse inside a coffin containing a 'pure-blooded German', and nails him in, thus nailing down his own crossing-over into madness and into the Nazi metanarrative. Again, Kopfrkingl slips into a mad soliloquy concerning Buddhism, yet his statement to himself that 'you are Buddha' reflects the Pirandellian hero's drive to 'become a god to regain his original grace' (Umstead-Radcliff, 1967: 13). The metaphor of god with 'Author-God', the generator of the narrative seducing the reader which Barthes' manifesto tells us to demolish, reflects Nazism and the Führer and any of the gatekeepers of phallogocentric 'new waves' of ideology. Thus, when Kopfrkingl is depicted in the film as a kind of Hitler-puppet when presiding over his wife's funeral, he is

again acting as automaton of the author-god, as he has throughout the film with his dense narrative bias.

There is no ethical reasoning to this; it is simply the result of his own greed – of ‘justifying himself with a puppet-logic constructed’ – which acts as allegory for the overarching narratives being presented around the production of the film (Umstead-Radcliff, 1967: 13). Given his efficiency as cremator, a Nazi delegate offers Kopfrkingl an integral role within the party which is to be kept ‘top secret’ – cementing how his new-found liberty from public deception is to be short-lived. His role is ostensibly to coordinate the death camps for the Holocaust, a role he accepts on the basis of expediting man’s journey from the torture of existence to the freedom of his soul in death – the big lie he has been pedalling throughout to mitigate his own greed. With all the build-up to his murder of Lakmé, his subsequent murder of Mili offers a strong hint that he has also murdered Dvořák, who is seen hanging (like Lakmé) in the bowels of the crematorium as Mili is led to his death. The effect here is of a dilution of the viewer’s shock towards Kopfrkingl’s actions through their multiplicity. Thus, his willingness to accept the role as gatekeeper to the Holocaust is not shocking because it is merely the cremator accepting his role within the overarching narrative of Nazism.

Yet as Bettelheim warns, ‘the oppressor will always be cast out in the end’, and our awareness of the outcome of World War II solidifies this foreboding (Herz, 2006). *The Cremator* offers an insight into how this outcome is inevitable in his attempted murder of his daughter, whose journey to the ‘temple of death’ reflect Mili’s, with a repetition of certain instances in the graveyard, but this time the journey is rushed and the dissolution of structure suggested in the overlapping scenes and surreal images of spectres and characters splitting in two suggest an internal crisis which threatens the upkeep of the big lie. By this stage Kopfrkingl’s actions are verging on massacre (reflecting the genocidal nature of the Final

Solution), but in his complacency to expedite his action his daughter manages to escape. The boundary between life and death is thus retained, whereas the cage locking in his ‘big secret’ is burst open – by revealing that Kopfrkingl is not the ‘author-god’ of his narrative, he is not ‘Buddha’, an answer to the Baudrillardian question of: ‘what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith?’ is provided (Baudrillard, 1994: 6). The outcome is that:

Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacra – not unreal, but a simulacra, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference of circumference (*Ibid.*).

Kopfrkingl’s mitigation against murder, massacre and even genocide through madness is not a viable one, then. His ability to perform such deplorable actions is based on his willingness to accept the narrative presented to him which he must follow in order to gain status, wealth and in turn power. Kopfrkingl has been hell-bent on becoming director of the crematorium throughout and his willingness to disregard others, even his own family, to reach this goal has nothing to do with madness, only lust for power. Likewise, with being promoted to the ‘special mission’ of coordinating the gas chambers, genocide is a straightforward step towards an increase in power: the hunt he relishes.

EAR OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

There are many funny qualities to Karel Kachyňa’s 1970 film *The Ear* (*Ucho*). Not only was it produced after the generally agreed New Wave period of 1963-8, and at the beginning of the Normalization period when the Prague Spring was being frozen out, but its anti-establishment tone is so directly aimed at the Communist Party that it seems unthinkable that the film ever made it to completion, albeit only to be banned immediately afterwards. Hames argues that Kachyňa’s association to the writer Jan Procházka (with whom he co-wrote the film’s screenplay), whose ‘political pedigree was not in doubt’, went a long way to

explaining this (Hames in Kachyňa, 2005). Elsewhere, Hames also points out that Procházka ‘was accused by the KGB of heading an anti-Party group’ and that it was thus unsurprising that ‘Kachyňa /Procházka films *Funny Old Man* (*Směšný pán*, 1969) and *The Ear* (*Ucho*, 1970) should have been suppressed . . . the second before it could be shown’ (Hames, 2009: 81). Thus, there is a tightrope between negotiating the constraints of the authorities by association, and death by association. This is a constant dilemma for Kopfrkingl, who shares a boys-club association to Reinke. This link allows him to get away with doing what he wants to further himself and is a crucial aspect of the implications the association to the authorities of New Wave filmmakers has in relation to this question of holding up the mirror to the Normalization period. By rising to prominence under the regime, there is the suggestion of an inherent profit to be made from the conditions of the regime, a dilemma which is dealt with in *The Ear* in relation to its central character, Ludvík (Radoslav Brzobohatý). The film depicts a married couple, Ludvík and Anna (Jiřina Bohdalová) whose leverage within the establishment is demonstrated by the presidential reception they attend at Prague Castle. When they return to their suburban Prague home, however, they find it is being bugged by the authorities, and this paranoid episode serves as the stage for much of the action in the film.

As in *The Cremator*, the film depicts how the external conditions surrounding characters impacts on their personal relationships and family life in an even more claustrophobic manner. Kachyňa uses close-up shots within the confines of the home which squeeze the voyeuristic viewer into the characters’ private lives. The mise-en-abyme effect of this is with regards to the couple’s privacy being invaded upon by the authorities in the form of listening devices placed around the home. Thus, like *The Cremator*, there are two levels of critique: one relates to the effects the totalitarian state has upon personal relationships, while the other is a reflection of the overarching political situation, and how these overlaps reflect

the grotesque trope of the New Wave and increases the Kafkaesque sense of the oppressed individual's having something to do with their own oppression. The bugging of the home allows the authorities to listen in to incriminating evidence regarding the political situation, but also gives them access to Ludvík's character, which Hames argues is 'self-obsessed, will do anything for power . . . and will back-track on his views for the sake of survival' (Hames, 2005ii.: 75-76). Again, this reverberates with Kopfrkingl, who alters his Czech nationalistic rhetoric to German and bends to the obtuse degree that he is willing to forego his family for his own rise. Kopfrkingl is given greater responsibility by the regime when he carries this out, and with Ludvík being given a surprise promotion at the end of *The Ear*, a reiteration of the type of personality required to succeed is made.

The setting of the bourgeois home, tailor-made for the nuclear family and *given* to Ludvík and Anna by the authorities, generates a sense of a force 'somewhere behind' which the film hones into. The viewer is at times reminded of their status as viewer looking in on the characters in instances of self-reflection. In one scene at the party, a drunk dissident is blurting the positive aspects of the loosening of the Stalinist imperative where religious and political iconography are allowed to coexist. As the officer, who later moves away from a religious statue inside the castle because it makes him uncomfortable, takes notice, the drunk turns to the camera to complete his rant, engaging the viewer. That he is made uncomfortable by the statue points to the suspicion of phallogocentrism rather than any single ideology: is he afraid of the sacred? Or is he afraid of listening devices which might have been placed there? The acknowledgement of the viewer's position of watching this happen generates an awareness of the potential outcome for this character, thus incriminating the viewer in passive complicity as inactive spectator, and the ambiguity of this subtle movement urges the viewer to consider a wider picture than the contemporary political landscape. As Elisabetta Girelli points out, 'off-screen space is always . . . implied in *The Ear*, in the form of an overarching

system' (Girelli, 2011: 15). That system does not necessarily have to account for the authorities, it could represent any overarching system under phallogocentric culture.

The omnipresence of the authorities on the couple's lives alters their behaviour to tow the party line, unlike this drunk. Anna's drunkenness at and after the party, however, is similarly a problem for her slipping up in this sense. This is one example of the public/private overlap projected in the film, with Anna's drunkenness causing her to let her domestic duties slip (Ludvík laments the messy state of their kitchen at home as he berates her for drinking vodka from the bottle). For Anna, however, Ludvík has also let his duties within the relationship slip, with his preoccupation with work and in this scene the ongoing paranoia of totalitarian surveillance distracting him from fulfilling his duty to 'at least once a week, even if it is drab' have sexual intercourse. This distraction on account of the Party is revealed as having been going on for some time, with the pun of reading out his brickworks project in bed rather than putting theory into practice mocked by Anna.

As viewers, our voyeuristic gaze at these marital issues is uncomfortable within the constricted confines of the family home, and this is largely down to the discomfort felt by Ludvík in their private acts being watched. Indeed, when the couple are first dropped off and realise their keys are missing, Anna goes to relieve herself on the street, to which Ludvík snaps 'there are people around', also a self-reflexive nod to the viewer's gaze. So when the camera turns to Anna with her skirts held up, the viewer again becomes complicit in this uncomfortable watching. This is reinforced later when Anna is trying to coax Ludvík to bed wearing only her negligee, but is told to 'put something on, don't run around naked'.

'Off-screen' is always a reality in the film, and those 'off-screen' participants: the writers, director, cast and crew, producers, film studio and authorities are the ones in control of the narrative and the characters. The viewer is made aware of this through these instances of self reflection; however, there is an inherent inability to alter the course of the narrative for

the viewer with its inherent predestination. What this metafictional element outlines is how the characters operate under totalitarian conditions in a mirroring of this sense of fate; of an inability to alter the course of the narrative for those operating under totalitarianism. To satirise these conditions, therefore, is a means of ‘defying fate’, a term with great relevance to Vladimír Morávek’s *Bored in Brno* (*Nuda v Brně*, 2003), which carries the subtitle ‘A Comedy Defying Fate’, and which will be discussed in the next chapter. As Hames argued, one funny aspect of the New Wave was that the tone of dissidence came almost entirely from ‘within’ the Party. Indeed, Ludvík and Anna are presented as the ideal couple, Party members, invited to a grand party of the establishment and who have been given as part of this system a nice suburban Prague home. Girelli describes totalitarian society’s complete regard for ‘private’ as having:

On the one hand fostered a sense of distance and alienation in Czechoslovak citizens; a separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ characterised perceptions of social identifications, and inserted a sense of dispossession in the relationship between ordinary people and their environment (Girelli, 2011: 7).

This sense of dispossession is reflected on the discovery of the listening devices: while the house has been *given* to the couple, the authorities retain a sense of ownership which they implement with this action. Ludvík’s association to the Party, however, changes this dynamic of oppression, generating a Kafkaesque sense of complicity and an overlap between oppressed and oppressor. This is brought out by Anna, who snaps at Ludvík for telling her to close the window when he is burning papers in the WC. Anna berates him, saying: ‘You never bother any more. You only bother about yourself’ (Kachyňa, 2005). This selfishness reflects Kopfrkingl’s in *The Cremator*, especially when the issue of having broken the rules by taking in Anna’s aunt in their home is thought to have been revealed by her lingering possessions in their attic where a search appears to have been carried out. Ludvík’s reaction to this is to say: ‘I should have given her the boot’ (Kachyňa, 2005), thus turning his back on family to protect his own self-interests like Kopfrkingl, to which Anna retorts that he

invited her in the first place. Ludvík is thus in a process of revising to protect himself, and this is what his straining over the series of flashbacks to the party is all about. He is trying to understand what signifiers pointed to his own suspicion to uncover some hidden meaning in what his colleagues have said. He flashes back to a colleague warning: ‘see how he serves the food? None of them are trained waiters, they are all spies’ (Kachyňa, 2005), increasing the sense of paranoia over being watched at the same time as being ironically self-reflexive in relation to the New Wave trope of overlapping roles within the films and their production. He is then warned to ‘keep to himself’ that he knows the under-scrutiny Klepáč, and realises that his association to excommunicated Party members could be to blame for his own situation. This comes with a speech made by the regional leader, in which the elder statesman announces that ‘they are still among us, those who only call themselves comrades’ (Kachyňa, 2005). Thus, when Ludvík declares to ‘the ear’ that he hardly knew his three colleagues, one of whom is a neighbour whose home’s lights are on with people walking around inside, his own electricity is returned, as if he has said what needs to be said to clear his name.

Anna’s attempt to call Mrs Klepáč when the phone line is reinstated signifies a closer relationship to this excommunicated family than Ludvík lets on to, and she is scolded by her husband for making such an incriminating move. Again, like Kopřivský, Ludvík is willing to sacrifice others around him for his own protection. Anna retorts that ‘you only care about yourself, you leave a trail of corpses. You didn’t tell about your brother in England. You would join any movement, left or right, to reach the top’ (Kachyňa, 2005). The ‘trail of corpses’ and willingness to follow any movement to reach the top reinforces the connection with Kopřivský; however, this act of defiance from Anna is more like insolence, it is disruption rather than destruction, since her revelation about her brother-in-law has incriminating significance and could cause more trouble for them and for their family. The reaction from Ludvík is to resort to violence to put down resistance; again, the oppressed

becomes the oppressor. Anna is given a bloody nose and is placed under cold water, a scene which is again uncomfortable viewing but retains a sense of the comic in its farcical playing out. The outcome is also significant, with how violence puts down resistance in relation to the Warsaw Pact invasion, and the scene which follows is a kind of normalisation, with a subdued Anna appearing in a bathrobe, sobered and drinking coffee, before turning to her domestic duties to retain order. The association made here in this overlapping of personal relationships with wider, social concerns is between the nuclear, patriarchal family's methods of normalising its own structure and societal normalisation under the phallogocentric totalitarian state after the Warsaw Pact invasion: disruptions and dissidence are suppressed with violence.

A CASE AGAINST THEM

The grotesque overlapping of public/private feeds into the uncanny: the couple feel uncannily ill-at-ease in their own home. That the listening devices are given the title 'ear' reinforces the grotesque and reflects the opening sequence of *The Cremator*, where random body parts intertwine with the motif of the predatory cats ready to pounce when the boundaries keeping them 'safe' are brought down. The dilemma over 'us' and 'them' and Václav Havel's assertion that the people 'make the system' also allows for the paranoia of this kind of surveillance to occupy a status of *différance*: whilst the intrusion on the couples' private home begs the question: 'what do the authorities want to know?', the banality of the couple dealing with domestic disputes begs the question: 'what is worth watching here?' The paranoia on both sides is reached by this 'inserted sense of dispossession in the relationship between ordinary people and their environment' Girelli outlines (Girelli, 2010: 7). The uncanny aspect to this invasion of the couple's home is that through their close association to

the Party, they are part of the system of oppression. The system which has *given* them opportunities to *take* is the one which *takes* their personal freedom away – this is the tightrope alluded to earlier. As Kundera suggests, this entire enterprise is down to the ‘magical status of the bureaucratic file’ (Kundera in Gross, 1990: 83); a case is being made against them. The Kundera-esque ‘them-not-us’ argument alluded to in the introduction to this thesis underpins the uncanny, and the couple’s unhomely feeling of being trapped within huge, impersonal forces yet somehow taking it personally; of feeling slighted by external forces but feeling part of the system; of being at home at the same time as feeling like somewhere else, somewhere alien, generates a deep sense of the Kafkaesque in *The Ear*.

This notion of a character feeling part of the system which oppresses them again feeds into Pirandellism, where characters’ strings are being pulled but with a suggestion that these strings are comparable to the human passions; that self-interest plays its part in their being manipulated by the overarching narrative; that *them* is closer to *us* than the individual might want to believe. Yet this all retains a sense of humour in Czech culture: Anna’s profound questioning of ‘What are we, still human beings? What do you want from us, ear? Shall we kill ourselves?’ is followed by ‘I threw your bugs in the loo, maybe now you can call the plumber. I’ve called three times’ (Kachyňa, 2005). The move away from ‘killing ourselves’ to humour reflects the dilemma of whether to laugh in the face of dire circumstances to deflect from them or to attempt suicide – all of which are means of ‘defying fate’ and again feeds into the Kafkaesque, where the grotesque split between the comic and the tragic is a key characteristic of Kafkaesque guilt. The apportioning of blame seems to be directed elsewhere, ‘somewhere behind’; yet the grotesque continues to blur any notions of set divisions. The haunting feeling produced via the distancing of allegory in the New Wave is that ‘*they* might be *us*’; the explicitness of the political critique in *The Ear* seems to confirm the greatest fear for the Czech people: that *we* are our own oppressors. The question of

holding up a mirror to Normalization Liehm poses brings into the picture a sense of Kafkaesque guilt: that those responsible for the oppressive environment are in fact us. This is concisely depicted when danger in *The Ear* is diminished by Ludvík being appointed minister, to which he responds, 'I'm scared'. In this sense, even victories for characters within the totalitarian state are met with dread, such is the feeling of scepticism and paranoia the state produces. Examining how these conditions, even after the fall of Communism, grotesquely cross over into the post-Communist, consumer-society film production in the Czech Republic will be the basis of the next chapter.

SUMMARY

With Herz's *The Cremator* (1969) and Kachyňa's *The Ear* (1970) being completed at the beginning of the Normalization period, the films' association to the New Wave heightens the sense of overlap discussed in previous chapters. That production of *The Cremator* occurred on the hinge of the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact invasion magnifies this overlap to a great extent. Herz's association with New Wave directors and Kachyňa's association with the establishment also generate nuance with regards to overlaps between the oppressed and the oppressors. The self-reflexivity of an exaggerated monster in *The Cremator* and the affluent family in *The Ear*, who both suffer and seek to gain from their oppressive environments, develops this theme of an overlap in terms of blame. By considering these themes in relation to previous chapters which engaged with New Wave films and the background to the New Wave in Czechoslovak cinema, this chapter leads into the final chapter on films produced after the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. The object of this method is to consider Czech characters under the various auspices of phallogocentric culture as presenting a cultural thread relevant under any regime. In doing this, we take the New Wave out of isolation and consider the phenomenon as part of something greater.

CHAPTER THREE: VELVET GENERATION AND THE FLOOD OF CONSUMERISM

AN INCREASED PROVINCIALISM

Since the fall of Communism in 1989, the Czech film industry has witnessed filmmakers of the ‘Velvet Generation’ receiving international recognition and awards at film festivals around the globe. For Antonín J. Liehm, however, the Velvet Generation ‘didn’t just fail to build on the best from Czech history but returned Czech cinema to the provincial misery of the pre-World War II era’ (Buchar, 2004: 2). As outlined in the introductory chapter, A. J. Liehm and Mira Liehm describe the relatively prosperous 1920s in the newly formed Czechoslovakia as pushing a profit-driven film industry towards an ‘increased provincialism’ (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 23). This commercially oriented approach is lamented by Jiří Menzel, who had described the 1960s as his ‘ideal time’ despite the regime (Menzel in Buchar, 2004: 38). Indeed, according to Peter Hames, Menzel’s misgivings about the privatisation of the film industry after the fall of Communism led him to describe it as ‘licensed robbery’ (Hames, 2001). Elsewhere Hames has outlined how:

directors were made redundant and 1,500 technicians lost their jobs. Another director noted that not even the Nazi occupation or the height of Stalinism had led to such a catastrophic drop in production, which after 1990 dropped by around two thirds (Hames, 2006: 5).

The privatisation of the film industry thus had a ‘catastrophic’ effect on film production and, as outlined in the introduction, Saša Gedeon (whose film *Return of the Idiot* (*Návrat idiota*, 1999) earned him, amongst others, the Findling Award at the Cottbus Film Festival) argues that his contemporary filmmakers are not connected to the New Wave; that the New Wave was ‘united’ by its opposition to the regime while the present day directors are just a ‘bunch of isolated individualists’ (Gedeon in Buchar, 2004: 31). There is an assumption, brought out in the term ‘united’, that the New Wave was a coordinated attack against the regime, something the New Wave directors have expressed was not the case

elsewhere in this thesis.¹⁴ The limitations of this lack of coordinated opposition to the regime are part of the critique of Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* as being disruptive rather than destructive. Indeed, if one characteristic does unite the New Wave it is this very fragmented nature of the opposition to the regime, developed by the trope of the grotesque as discussed in Juraj Herz's *The Cremator*, the disseminated nature of youth revolt as discussed in Miloš Forman's early works, and the crossing over of roles and use of avant-garde techniques by a relatively small group of filmmakers over a relatively short period of time. Gedeon thus links the New Wave with the Velvet Generation more closely in this sense by describing the latter as fragmented. Gedeon also points to directors wanting to 'make comedies' or 'be sarcastic', adding another connection to the darkly comic trope of the New Wave (Buchar, 2004: 32).

While films produced after Communism did not have to factor in strict censorship, the requisite for commercial success under a privatised industry provided an experimental space in relation to the New Wave, where it had been proven that success could be found in the deployment of 'entertainment films' without diminishing artistic expression. One enabling factor in this pushing of the boundaries is the link between the comic and the tragic, which Gedeon alludes to. The negative comic connotations of 'sarcasm' plays into the darkly-comic trope of the New Wave, while Gedeon's suggestion that all of this suggests the Velvet Generation of filmmakers see themselves as in a 'playground' serves to further reinforce the connection with the New Wave.

Liehm spots this connection when he argues that the post-Communist era is 'even more interesting' in how New Wave concerns 'stretch out' into it and that 'what we were doing in the past . . . we are doing today freely and with great applause' (Buchar, 2004: 2). For Liehm, 'the 90s, like the era of Stalinism, were years of ideology: years of denouncing

¹⁴ Liehm & Liehm point to an avant-garde manifesto in 1922 which aimed to 'touch intellect' through film (Liehm & Liehm, 1977: 23); while, as Michael Koresky argues, only the adaptation of Bohumil Hrabal's *Pearls of the Deep* in 1966 by Věra Chytilová, Jaromil Jireš, Jiří Menzel, Jan Němec, and Evald Schorm was considered the movement's 'unofficial manifesto'

the past and celebrating the present and the future' (*Ibid.*). This comparison between Stalinism and the 1990s is hinged on the idea of a culture in a state of flux; not the social conditions that people lived under. The concern here is how any 'new wave' of ideology takes hold, and how people are forced to adapt. Gedeon echoes this idea when he suggests current filmmakers are 'like adolescents'; however, he adds that this is a 'problem' (Buchar, 2004: 34). Yet the metaphor of adolescent angst in relation to self-realisation and coming-of-age is a prevalent New-Wave concern. Miloš Hrma, the young protagonist in Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains*, is a character occupying this liminal in-between stage which is reflective of the Prague Spring. The New Wave was a challenge to society through culture in the face of totalitarianism to 'come-of-age' and realise itself on the cusp of the Prague Spring. Similarly, the Velvet Generation found themselves in a 'coming-of-age position with regards to capitalism and democracy. For Gedeon, 'democracy as a system has to develop . . . I see this freedom and it amazes me' (Buchar, 2004: 34). His contemporary filmmakers within this freedom are 'in a developing stage' and 'need more time' (*Ibid.*). This ironically is the tragedy of the New Wave: a burgeoning Spring which was aborted by the Warsaw Pact invasion and the ensuing period of Normalization; it was *not* afforded 'more time', just like Miloš Hrma who was cut down in his prime.

Indeed, Menzel described the 1960s as the best period for him:

It was the '60s when I started. It was such an ideal time, ideal atmosphere to make films . . . but on the other side there wasn't total freedom. So there was a stimulus for creativity to break the ideological barrier (Menzel in Buchar, 2004: 38).

Here, Menzel talks of an 'ideal time' in spite of the totalitarian conditions which the New Wave films speak out against. In contrast, the 'freedom' of the contemporary for Gedeon creates problems in relation to filmmaking. The lack of freedom in the 1960s is picked up by Menzel, but Liehm points to how producing films under a nationalised industry allowed a kind of artistic freedom which the current crop do not enjoy. The stimulus on both

sides, then, is in relation to the breaking of the ‘ideological barrier’ (or, as was the case for Forman, the aesthetic) of the times through creativity. This resonates with the question over Karel Kachyňa having the ‘ear’ of the establishment through Jan Procházka, co-screenplay writer for *The Ear* and accomplished political figure. In benefiting from the conditions of the very regime being criticised, a Kafkaesque blurring of the lines of guilt is generated via the association to those powers of oppression.

Gedeon talks about modern filmmakers as in a playground, and Menzel echoes this sentiment in relation to the New Wave: ‘On the one hand there was an economical irresponsibility here. Nobody was responsible for anything’ (Buchar, 2004: 38). The ideology of a state-owned film industry laid out the ‘playground’ for the New Wave directors to take the kind of chances a commercialised film industry would never allow; however, under democracy, capitalism has obscured Czech filmmakers’ access to this playground. When asked about ‘decisions’ made about films in the 1960s, Menzel stresses that chief dramaturge at Barrandov Studios, Ludvík Toman, was ‘only a puppet, a very willing puppet, in the hands of our colleagues’ (Buchar, 2004: 39). This character summary reflects the Pirandellian concerns – explored in the previous chapter – over individuals working under a stringent system yet occupying positions of leverage which make their manipulations from above seem less totalising, such as Kopfrkingl in *The Cremator*.

SARCASTIC FILMS

Given the darkly-comic strand demonstrated in the overlapping periods of Czech filmmaking from Frič to Vávra through the New Wave, evidence of this strand continuing post-Communism is hinted at in Gedeon’s assertion about the comedy genre and ‘sarcastic films’. We have seen how even in the New Wave the grotesque lingering of ‘old’ concerns to do with Nazism, for instance, had not been extinguished but underpinned the Kafkaesque sense

of something ‘somewhere behind’ which propels the Czech narratives onto a wider relevance. It is no surprise that the ‘amazing freedom’ felt ‘overnight’ Gedeon alludes to in relation to modern Czech filmmaking continues to be hindered not only by the limitations of the contemporary social conditions, but by the ramifications of ‘old’ which linger there.

Indeed, the first wave of Czech films following the Velvet Revolution are often bracketed as a reaction to the conditions of Communism, a kind of cathartic exercise to expel the demons of totalitarianism. Tomáš Vorel’s *Smoke* (*Kouř*, 1991) is sub-titled ‘Musical of the Totalitarian Era’ (*Rytmikál totalitního věku*). The motif of smoking the film’s title alludes to is a prominent feature of the New Wave, where characters smoking tobacco are everywhere. The connection between characters smoking and the factory producing pollution connects the workers to their environment in a manner that suggests a continuous mode of production. This is represented in the worker who becomes so entrenched in the factory that he lives in the furnace room. The film follows a recent university graduate Miroslav Čáp who is beginning work as an engineer. His assignment is to coordinate a solution to the pollution problem in the town, but he discovers that the project has already been overseen by a mysterious engineer named Václav who now works as a stoker in the workplace. The viewer is given a guided tour along with Miroslav of the workplace, a device discussed in relation to *Closely Observed Trains* and *The Cremator*, where a character’s introduction to the workplace is shared with the viewer. For Miroslav, this tour is conducted by his new boss Šmíd, who describes Václav as a ‘hot head’, while ignoring the raucous behaviour of Miroslav’s younger colleagues. When the scene cuts to the outside setting, the device of smoke in the air is imbued with the symbolism of a red mist which accompanies children playing with an abandoned tank. There are connotations here of the younger generation being contaminated with this ‘smoke’, which lingers somewhere behind. While Communism has fallen, another invasion has occurred on Czech soil, a more insidious invasion of a foreign

culture whose presence excludes the everyday Czech access from key positions of leverage: consumerism. The solution to the oppression on the individual from large, impersonal forces outwith their control presented in the films and demonstrated in this study thus far has been to double as oppressor and ride the cusp of the wave.

The influence of Charlie Chaplin's American-produced silent films on Frič's early works, especially *Life is a Dog* (*Život je pes*, 1933) which lends its title from Chaplin's *A Dog's Life* (1918), has been outlined elsewhere in this thesis, demonstrating an attraction to American culture in Czechoslovakia. During the Cold War, however, American culture was the 'other' in relation to Communist culture yet its presence is felt in New Wave films. This 'other' presence, however, is linked with the sense of youth revolt in, for example, Forman's *The Firemen's Ball*, where the American-influenced styles of rock 'n' roll and jazz prompt the youth into action. In Forman's debut film, *The Audition*, the influence of James Dean's depiction of Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), in conjunction with these styles of music, is felt deeply in the two amalgamated short films which make up the feature. As outlined in the introductory chapter, Girelli describes the Czechoslovak New Wave as having been aligned with the Western 'rebellious youth culture' of the time (Girelli, 2011: 49-59), while Hames adds that it was a phenomenon of 'international significance' (Hames in Mazierska & Kristensen, 2004). With the fall of Communism, this Western culture which had been 'somewhere behind' in relation to the New Wave was able to arrive in a deluge on the cusp of the wave of a market economy.

The feeling of forces 'somewhere behind' is brought out in *Smoke*, when the scene cuts from the children playing beside an abandoned tank with red mist around them to the confines of Miroslav's bedsit. The conditions of his abode represent decay, left over from the Communist era, with its poor upkeep and claustrophobic environment. His solution to this, one depicted throughout Czech culture, is to go to the pub. The convivial atmosphere is

forced by the characters' need to alleviate themselves from the loneliness of their conditions and is shown to be merely an escape from that reality as they tumble out after hours with no regard for their wider environment, spilling over the streets, falling around, the sounds of streams of liquid audible on the soundtrack.

That these streets are the same ones taken to go to work develops the theme of working and social lives crossing over, where the emphasis on production is so strong that the characters' lives are constantly surrounded by their workplace. The next morning Miroslav awakens with a hangover and is running late for work. Here, the hedonistic approach to this lifestyle of drinking shows its negative impact, which is reflective of the conversation Miroslav has with Běda the night before: 'What are you doing in a hole like this?' Běda asks. 'House, money, work', is his reply (Vorel, 2005). The order of this reply is significant because it demonstrates a desire to take the fruits of the labour first, expect the money second, while working to earn these rewards is placed last. It should be 'work, money, house', but the desire to consume first and pay later is reflective of the hedonistic drinking scenes. Thus, when Miroslav is confronted by Helenka (Monika Šeligová) that he is lonely, his response being 'I'm not alone, I just booze it all away' signifies a problematic relationship with this hedonism: that it is really compensating for something lacking in his own humanity (Vorel, 2005).

The solution to the oppression on the individual from large, impersonal forces outwith their control presented in this study thus far has been to double as oppressor and ride the cusp of the wave; by getting drunk, the hedonist 'boozes it all away', generating another kind of double in the intoxicated self which, according to Miroslav, fills the void of his humanity being attacked; yet has the negative impact of the after-effects of excess. Miroslav's boss, Šmíd, reflects the trait of doubling as oppressor when it is revealed that he played an integral role in having the better qualified Václav removed from his position as engineer to further his

own career. This has implications over the treatment of Otakar Vávra in terms of the argument of his facilitating regimes to further his own career; however, it is also entrenched in the Kafkaesque when the alternative presented is the plight of Václav. The tension over Šmíd's role in Václav's demise is brought to a head at the film's conclusion, when Václav is confronted by his love interest, Liduška, and told: 'We must do something' to prevent Šmíd repeating his sabotaging of Miroslav this time (Vorel, 2005). After initially protesting that 'it's not worth it', Václav almost falls into saying 'it is worth it', and as he repeats this it becomes a kind of slogan, repeated and crescendoing around the town, with the youth rising up in revolt (Vorel, 2005). When Generál (Milan Dvořák) realises that the insurrection is overwhelming, he turns to Václav and starts to applaud the formerly expelled engineer, thus protecting the old guard from the force of the insurrection by patronising this new leader out of exile and integrating a changing of the guards.

COMEDY DEFYING FATE

The integration into the invading culture is reflected everywhere in Vladimír Morávek's *Bored in Brno* (*Nuda v Brně*, 2003), where the implanting of American culture onto this site of capitalist society in its infancy appears to be influencing the characters dealing with this 'new' consumerist ideology with the burden of 'old' on their shoulders. This overlap between Communism and consumerism is reflected in the sub-heading for *Bored in Brno* which feeds into the comic/tragic overlap which has been a central theme of the texts studied thus far: 'A Comedy Defying Fate': which is an outlining of the Kunderaesque way to deal with tragic fates by laughing at their seriousness. The opening of *Bored in Brno* outlines the tragic fate of one of its characters, Miroslav (Miroslav Donutil), whose exact time of death is foretold. Along with this tragic foreboding as a feature of the grotesque, liminality is another New Wave motif which features in the film.

Bored in Brno is layered metafictionally: Miroslav is an actor and is depicted filming a scene for a Czech television production early in the film. The self-reflexivity of showing the mechanisms of film production within the film itself draws attention to its own status as film. With the New Wave motif of roles crossing-over – with directors appearing in one another's films, writers taking acting roles, singers and pop stars in prominent film roles – this instance of self-reflexivity in *Bored in Brno* reflects this blurring of the distinction between 'character' and 'actor' as in the theatre of Pirandello. It also provides a backdrop for the idea of acting in relation to Baudrillardian simulation. For Baudrillard:

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence . . . Pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact . . . whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary' (Baudrillard, 1994: 3).

Michálek's depiction, then, of a film-set within the film (using the same tools used for filming *Bored in Brno* as props for the scene, and the crew members as 'characters') blurs the lines between the 'real' and the 'imaginary', since these characters and props are not 'pretending' to be anything, yet are in a state of simulation. The crew members *are* crew members; the props depicting set tools *are* tools used on film sets. Thus, this simulation 'threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false"' in a move towards a 'hyperreality', since 'simulation is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal' (Baudrillard, 1994: 1).

What the blurring of the lines between the real and fiction in this scene (a simulation of characters driving in a car) drives at is how, as Rex Butler suggests, by simulation coming 'too close to the original', instead of 'bringing the system closer to the original, only drives it further away' (Butler, 1999: 25). This generates the Baudrillardian *trompe l'oeil* or the 'enchanted simulation' (Baudrillard, 1994: 157).

Nadia Kaneva and Elza Ibroscheva offer an episode which occurred as a social experiment in Prague in 2003 as an example of this *trompe-l'oeil* in action. After an advertising drive for a new hypermarket named 'Czech Dream' was played on TVs, radios, in magazines and in newspapers, four thousand people turned up for its grand opening to find that the storefront was nothing more than a facade in front of a large field. The hoax was conducted by 'two film students who had set out to make a documentary about the lure of consumerism and the power of advertising that, in their view, were transforming post-Communist Czech society' (Kaneva and Ibroscheva, 2016). For Kaneva and Ibroscheva, the 'experiment illustrates, above all, that consumption and consumerism have become important factors in post-Communist societies' (*Ibid.*). There is an uncanny resemblance here, however, with the narrative of *Hard Life of an Adventurer*, with the twist in the plot that some overarching narrative was controlling an elaborate hoax which self-reflexively highlights the dependence on information sources deemed reliable, such as propaganda under totalitarianism; advertising under consumerism.

In the film-set car scene in *Bored in Brno* the 'mechanisms which construct an image', or the tools of production and the cast and crew, are deliberately canvassed in a depiction of what Baudrillard calls 'slight figuration' in relation to *trompe l'oeil*, since the characters *are* actors and crew members and the props *are* viable tools. The function this serves in relation to self-reflexivity is in how *trompe-l'oeil* 'describe the void and absence found in any representational hierarchy which organises the elements of a painting [in this case film], as it does the political realm.' (Baudrillard, 1990: 154). Baudrillard argues that interpretation 'overlooks and obliterates this aspect of appearances in its search for hidden meaning' (Baudrillard, 1990: 152). Thus, film production becomes this 'site of play', or 'playground', as Gedeon describes it, for appearances in the twentieth century – not simply to uncover some 'truth', or a lack of it, but to divert from the 'unbearable' truth of reality; to

play, to relish in 'lightness', to have a laugh, to make comedies in the face of this tragic backdrop, to defy fate. Escapism replaces realist ideology. Gedeon answers Buchar's question over what makes a good film with:

A film today must be, first of all, entertaining . . . And I believe that a good film is the one which doesn't bore you when you're watching it and a week later you still think about it (Buchar, 2004: 32).

Bored in Brno: A Comedy Defying Fate is explicitly one such film; on the one hand it points to the very 'boredom' Gedeon rejects, but on the other explicitly 'defies' the fate of being forgettable in Gedeon's terms. Under these terms, film has become 'today', in consumerist societies, a source of entertainment, which Liehm expressed the New Wave filmmakers wanted to 'do more than'; yet Gedeon hints at some kind of nourishment which lasts with the viewer, so that they 'still think about it' a week later (Buchar, 2004: 32). This opposition between the New Wave's reduction in the necessity for 'entertainment films' for the sake of making 'art' films with a 'message' versus the present-day environment where entertainment is, for Gedeon at least, paramount, is examined by Baudrillard in relation to a utility product doubling as a luxury item in consumer societies. Baudrillard argues:

A washing machine serves as equipment and plays as an element of comfort, or prestige, etc. It is the field of play that is specifically the field of consumption. Here all sorts of objects can be substituted for the washing machine as a signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in the logic of symbols, objects are no longer tied to a function or to a defined need. This is precisely because objects respond to something different, either to a social logic, or to a logic of desire, where they serve as a fluid and unconscious field of signification (Baudrillard in Poster, 2001: 47).

Take a branded washing machine: the brand make washing machines with their logo emblazoned on them as part of this 'logic of signs'. Simultaneously, in the same home, a DVD player manufactured by the same company will have the same logo, only instead of the device performing the repetitive function of washing clothes, it is playing films for the consumer's entertainment. This overlap between luxury consumer good and luxury utilitarian equipment becomes part of this 'fluid and unconscious field of signification', where the logo

signifies luxury. The washing machine ‘plays’ as an item of comfort, which in Gedeon’s terms is what film does within consumerist societies; yet, as Gedeon suggests, film’s lasting effect belies this role. Yet for Baudrillard, ‘consumers are mutually implicated, despite themselves, in a general system of exchange and in the production of coded values . . . In this sense, consumption is a system of meaning like language’ (Baudrillard in Poster, 2001: 49). If, figuratively, consumption is a kind of language, then self-reflexively the production of films for consumption reveals how its narrative belongs to, and in doing so helps to generate, the system of meaning of its society – whether it be democratic, Nazi, Communist or consumerist, or indeed when lending itself to a dissident movement as with the New Wave in 1960s Czechoslovakia.

The term which is often used to describe the conditions after the fall of Communism in 1989 is that of a ‘flood’ of consumerism in Czechoslovakia and other post-Communist countries.¹⁵ Again, there is the link to the Biblical flood and the warning that the antediluvian conditions, and even those figures in control ‘before the flood’, are not going to have been uprooted that easily. Indeed, Akos Rona-Tas discusses the economic conditions after the fall of Communism in many of these countries as the worst state of recession since the Great Depression (Rona-Tas in Bandelj & Solinger, 2012: 149). Rona-Tas describes the effect of this while ‘Western consumerism flooded the region’ as ‘especially painful’ and that it ‘took almost a decade for these economies to reach the level they were at during the last years of communism’ (Rona-Tas in Bandelj & Solinger, 2012: 149).

This stagnation in the face of supposed upheaval is reflected in the title ‘*Bored in Brno*’. The film depicts a central character, Stanislav (Jan Budař, who co-wrote the screenplay with Morávek thus continuing the strand from the New Wave of overlapping

¹⁵ Akos Rona-Tas, ‘The Rise of Consumer Credit in Post-Communist Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland’, Nina Bandelj and Dorothy J. Solinger (eds.), *Socialism Vanquished, Socialism Challenged: Eastern Europe and China, 1989-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.149

roles), whose older brother Jaroslav (Martin Pechlát) chaperones to his first romantic meeting with his girlfriend, Olga (Kateřina Holánová), who lives in Brno and with whom he has shared an epistolary relationship for a year. The younger brother is depicted as having learning difficulties and looks to Jaroslav for guidance, setting up the coming-of-age theme which resonates with Miloš Hirma in *Closely Observed Trains*. Miloš's troubles with entering sexual maturity are reflected when Jaroslav offers advice on sex and using contraception and helps Stanislav to practise on a rohlík, a typical Czech bread roll which has phallic connotations in the film. The younger brother seems uninterested in this doctrinal approach, however, and later the elder reveals having less experience in these situations than he would like to admit.

While there is no generational difference between the two siblings, the difference in learning ability between the two suggests a gulf more like that of parent and child. The lack of experience suggested in the elder brother and the bringing of the two levels of maturity closer together temporally highlights the theme of the older generation's having failed to come of age and realise themselves; they are on the same level despite any assumed wisdom acquired through age or experience. Indeed, it is the older generation who suffer most in *Bored in Brno*, especially Olga's mother, Miriam (Jaroslava Pokorná), who fears her own isolation as her daughter falls for Stanislav. Miriam is even so anxious about getting hurt again in her own romantic life that she cancels a blind date she is supposed to be going on, which was supposed to provide the window for Olga and Stanislav's rendezvous. The alternative Olga pursues after it becomes clear that her mother will provide an obstacle to this end is to sedate her and lock her in a cupboard, emphasising the notion of the elder generation as docile and blind, an obstacle to the younger generation, as opposed to self-aware, experienced and wise.

What bridges the gap between the older, docile Miriam and her daughter and Stanislav entering into a relationship is the character Miroslav, the middle-aged actor who we are told will die at a specific time from the outset. Miroslav, a married man who struggles within the confines of his marriage, but who also struggles to cope with his guilt over his own infidelity in the film, endures a blundering affair with Vlasta (Pavla Tomicová). This relationship reflects Karel Kopřivský in *The Cremator*'s struggle to uphold a social mask and how even those with apparent experience in life and love continue to struggle from youth into maturity to come to terms with self-realisation. The paradigm being rejected here, however, is rather that of this perfect masculinity Mazierska draws attention to and instead there is a projection of the success of a male character who is opposed to this in Stanislav.

This theme of promoting peripheral characters in society is one which is presently a feature of Czech cinema, with Martin Kudláč pointing to the recent twenty-third Prague International Film Festival in March 2016 as having a 'selection [that] revolves mostly around the theme of outsiders and social outcasts' (Kudláč, 2016). The difficulty for the younger male generation in *Bored in Brno* to deal with realising themselves as 'outside' the masculine narrative is also reflected in the relationship between the characters Jan (Pavel Liška) and Pavel (Filip Rajmont). Pavel is forced to suppress his homosexual feelings for Jan and wear the mask of heterosexuality in order to maintain his level of intimacy with his love interest, who is heterosexual and thus out of reach. Jan, however, who is simulating the masculine paradigm while Pavel secretly pines for him, only achieves self-realisation in the death of Miroslav, when Jan's reaction to their despair is to comfort his friend so lovingly. Given the subheading of the film, the 'fate' of Miroslav and its ramifications for Jan and Pavel is paradoxical to the genre and hoists them onto the platform of Pirandellian, rather than tragic, heroes: 'characters' who struggle to maintain their social masks which ultimately leads to their downfall, since Jan and Pavel's concentration on driving is affected by having

spent all night drinking, with Pavel catching Jan watching and caressing him in his sleep. With the realisation of Jan's true feelings and their tiredness and the effects of alcohol, Miroslav's tragic fate is expedited.

The only characters who seem immune to concerns over how they fit into this narrative are Stanislav and Olga, who in their playfulness miss the seriousness apportioned by other characters to their situation. As 'others', these characters could be targets as comic victims in a Hobbesian kind of corrective laughter as outlined previously; however, their position on centre stage suggests a societal shift in the setting which includes these characters as not only figures of fun but as central characters.

The hinging of the 'old' and 'new' in this effect is, as Gedeon and Menzel suggest, a key concern of the Velvet Generation, who cannot ignore the 'old' theme of totalitarianism within their 'new', democratic setting. The boredom the film's title suggests illuminates the stagnation in relation to this new; however, this subtle shift marks the 'new' as having achieved some kind of progress. This movement within a stagnated setting is reflected in how the representation of claustrophobic living conditions, tenement housing estates which were erected during the Communist era, remain intact but function differently than in the past. Here is a community aware of each other's business, reflective of the 'watching' in *The Ear*, for example. However, while the borders between private life and public remain flimsy, which is a recurrent theme in the New Wave, the atmosphere in the current living conditions is opposed to the type of paranoid claustrophobia depicted in *The Ear*, where ironically the home is a spacious, suburban home. The community in *Bored in Brno* is engaged in a largely positive atmosphere, albeit the proximity of the living conditions conspire, in some cases, to cause conflict, with neighbours of Vlasta complaining about the noise in her apartment and the same at the apartment in Olga's building, where Jaroslav waits for Stanislav with a group of her neighbours. This suggests a subtle shift in the 'new' which the older generation, those

neighbours who complain and Miriam who wants to know her daughter's every move, simply have to be sedated against.

Miriam's overbearing nature threatens to shield Olga from her own desires. Yet the warning over the 'older generation' interfering with the liberty of the younger is suggested in the restricting effect Jaroslav's advice on sex has on Stanislav. When it comes to the deed, Stanislav struggles with the condom and only when he disregards this can he get on with the natural deed, meanwhile Miriam is comatosed in the cupboard under the effects of a chloroform suppressant. Comically, Miriam's reaction when she comes to is to threaten to jump out of the window and cause herself harm. The obstacle and the suppression of the natural for Stanislav was minor due to his willingness to abandon reason; however, the attempt by the older generation to inhibit the freedom of youth is reflected here in Miriam, and again reflects the conditions of the New Wave, where youth revolt is chastised on all sides by the older generation.

The root of the issue on sexual guidance from Jaroslav was his own inexperience in the field, and this is reflective of the older generation on the principles of freedom and the natural in general – under the old regime they have never experienced it. Experience for the older generation is negative: Miriam's concerns for her daughter stem from her own scepticism over romantic love since her experience of it has been painful. This is why the 'old' are being posited now as 'other' and become easy targets for laughter: the new generation generates Hobbesian laughter aimed at the older generation to reintegrate them by demonstrating their insufficiencies in the new.

A HYPERREAL

Yet the distinction between 'old' and 'new' remain blurred by the theme of romantic relationships, which spans the generations, providing much of the comedy in the film. A

theme throughout all of the films, from Frič through to the Velvet Generation, is that no one knows how to deal with romantic love. The scene where Miroslav and Vlasta are singing along to the pop song 'It's going to happen tonight' ironically reflects the foreboding of Miroslav's death from the beginning in how their understanding of the 'it' is sex rather than death. What the overlap with the car scene on Miroslav's film set points to is a crossing-over into the Baudrillardian hyperreal: Miroslav and Vlasta become part of the film's own narrative which they cannot escape due to their status as 'characters'. This is reflected in Vlasta's bedroom with her posters of Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), a Hollywood film whose reference has major significance on *Bored in Brno*. That John Cusak's character in the film enters another Hollywood actor, John Malkovich, in 'real life' is the premise and reflects the trompe-l'oeil trope of parodying theatricality of the New Wave, which in metafiction is aimed at the 'real'. This crossing-over between different aspects of reality is deeply metafictional and its reference in *Bored in Brno* in relation to the 'actor' Miroslav and the mirroring of his role as 'actor' and 'character' underline this as a central theme. The relationship between posters as 'windows' to Hollywood and the theme of the new wave of ideology, that of consumerism, in the 'new' setting of post-Communist Czech Republic is also a central concern of the film.

Hard Life of an Adventurer metafictionally pointed to Nazi political propaganda film, which was the equivalent of the Socialist Realism film under Communism Forman so opposed when starting out as a filmmaker. In *The Cremator*, the arbitrariness of the portrait of the president of Nicaragua Kopfrkingl hung in his living room as a bourgeois, decorative item of comfort self-reflexively pointed to one of the means of penetrating the privacy of the home deployed by the Nazis, with the necessity to hang a portrait of the Fuhrer in this fashion after Nazi occupation. The 'Czech Dream' anecdote which mirrored the hoax in *Hard Life of an Adventurer* pointed to how, like the propagandist messages under totalitarianism,

propaganda can infiltrate the home in much the same way under consumerism through advertising. The self-reflexivity of the film posters in this sense point to the overlap Gedeon outlines in 'today's' films between entertainment and utility. Film posters which are designed to advertise the product on sale are invited into the private home and hung on the walls as decorative items of consumption, but with the arbitrariness of taste Kopfrkingl's choice of portrait suggests: they are empty gestures.

The difference between a portrait of the Fuhrer and the president of Nicaragua or one's favourite film, however, is an apparent choice which is available under consumer societies. What the 'Czech Dream' anecdote indicates, however, is that 'choice' under consumerism is infiltrated through advertising, and the constant access to advertising in *Bored in Brno* reflects the means of state control under totalitarianism. Radios are always switched on and buzz in the background; televisions are surrounded in mass communion as with the group Jaroslav awaits his brother's return with; when Miroslav and Vlasta are singing in the car it is along to the radio; when they meet in the bar they are both alone and preoccupied with the bar television. The overlap suggested between film and this supposed 'reality' is reinforced through the mise-en-abyme effect of the film set and Miroslav as actor, thus the posters as 'windows' to this hyperreal within the domestic environment demonstrates the level to which this overarching narrative has been 'bought' by these characters since the 1990s and the ushering in of the new wave of ideology suggested in *Smoke*.

The site of Brno as a stagnated environment which hinges the 'old' and the 'new' reflects this theme and the overlap of the comic and tragic also gains significance in relation to this: the conflict between modern 'comedy' and the Elizabethan genre is ironically reflected in another film poster, that of John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1999), another Pirandellian film where the playwright 'comes on stage'. This poster appears with comic timing, just as Olga's mother is visually representing this 'old generation' on a hinge: literally

on the ledge between life and death, as she threatens to jump out of their apartment window should her daughter not release her. Again we have the comic/tragic overlap, the motif of the 'old' on a threshold, life and death, and the site of play offers windows to the site of the 'new' consumerist society, that of Hollywood, whilst ironically reflecting the tension between the comic genre in relation to Elizabethan drama through the reference to Shakespeare. This all reinforces Kundera's assertion on Kafka, that comedy is no comfort to the tragic victims, in that a comedy supposedly 'defying' fate fails to make the fate of Miroslav and Jan more bearable. The solution, however, remains the same, as reflected in the final scene. Stanislav and Olga, fulfilling the Elizabethan comedy-genre's happy couple's union, face one another, shrug, and then explode into laughter.

The theme of incompetent male characters who do not know how to deal with romantic relationships is one Jan Čulík laments as inexplicably overused in his critique of Michálek's adaptation of Emil Hakl's novel *Of Parents and Children* (O rodičích a dětech, 2002). Čulík questions:

Why is it then that when a narrative is transferred on to the screen it must submit to the somewhat stereotypical principle of contemporary Czech cinema which seems to argue over and over again that Czech men are self-obsessed weaklings, unable to maintain a long-term relationship? (Čulík, 2008).

This bundling male character motif is connected with the continued inability for male characters to subscribe to the masculinity Mazierska discusses. As a metaphor for masculinity within Czech and Czechoslovak culture, this relates to the Prague Spring within the Communist metanarrative: a moment of disruption in phallogocentric culture which is normalised afterwards. The continued reappearance of these male characters is a symbol of the patriarchs after the flood: regardless of the societal environment these characters continue to appear, from Joseph K. to Miloš Hirma to Ludvík Jahn to those characters in Michálek's recent films.

THOSE HORRIBLE GENES

As the title of Michálek's film suggests, this link between history repeating itself and genes is also a prominent one. Jan Dobrovský, producer of *Of Parents and Children*, describes the impact of 'old' on his being and the film's production:

I can't help myself, it is inside me: those genes are an evil beast. You'll see it is much stronger than anything else. The influence of society, the Communists, the bad schools: nothing has left that strong a mark on me as those horrible genes (Michálek, 2008).

Dobrovský blames his forbearers above anything else, including any one ideology. His inability to escape the 'old' is intrinsically linked with the setting of the Communist era but its arbitrariness in the face of the 'evil beast' within him reinforces the theme of the residue left after the flood of a new ideology. Regardless of the influence of society, phallogocentric culture – within which these 'bad genes' are allowed to remain – can sweep in 'overnight', as Gedeon attests, but with the remnants of the 'old' still residually *in* those who survived the flood.

The grotesquely 'monstrous' feeling of these 'bad genes' in relation to an 'evil beast' generates a Kafkaesque doubling of guilt: the nature of the 'bad genes' being 'in me' conflicts with the nurturing of the 'bad schools' and the 'influence of society' and deepens the sense of an overlap between external forces and the self when apportioning blame. This 'monster' also generates a sense of the uncanny, the feeling of something 'other' which is both unhomely and homely at the same time.

With Baudrillard's assertions on male desire as being driven to reproduce in relation to phallogocentrism in mind, the two central characters who embark on 'the walk' in *Of Parents and Children* are an aging father (Josef Somr) and his middle-aged son (David Novotný). The son is struggling, like his father still does, in his romantic relationships. He is dating a significantly younger woman, Marta (Mariana Kroftová), and systematically fails to explain to her the simple truth that he is with his father and cannot make their planned

meeting. Meanwhile, while on this walk with his father, the son's own son (Luboš Kostelný), who is more Marta's age, is in her flat seducing her. During their walk, the son has been explaining to his father a meeting with his ex-girlfriend (Zuzana Stivínová) in which she revealed they have a grown son together. This generates a revenge motive for the grandson and in a plot similar to Ludvík in *The Joke*, he is attempting to use sex as a weapon in this fight. Again, the affair has the effect of highlighting issues which are clearly already present in the relationship and could expedite its end, doing his father a favour in a sense. What is different here is that in this consumerist society the grandson also wants cash. The father offers his new-found son 300,000 Kč to buy a flat, but the son ends up spending half of the money on a new motorcycle. Not only does this reinforce the bundling male character's insufficiencies into the next generation, but it also connects a motif of American culture present in the New Wave to the present day conditions of consumerist culture in the Czech Republic. The aforementioned significance of James Dean's seminal role as Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause* on the youth revolt stemming from the USA after World War II, and the onus on the motorcycle as a symbol of this movement, is reflected in this acquisition by the son. The 'rebellion without a cause' motif, however, epitomises the anarchic, disruptive nature rather than destructive motif of rebellion in Czech culture under the different auspices of phallogocentric culture in the twentieth century and early twenty-first century respectively. The New Wave is described elsewhere in this thesis as having no central, unifying code of rebellion, and as such was powerless against the onset of Normalization, with many of its films being 'banned forever' after 1968. With regards to this incoherent approach, it is interesting that Michálek describes 'the walk [as] the most important thing' in *Of Parents and Children* (Michálek, 2008). The question remains, why does a walk to nowhere in particular matter so much? In logocentric terms, the 'walk' is geared towards an end goal, telos; however, under phallogocentrism this telos would mark the end of culture and of male desire.

The dominance of male perspective on the films I have offered for discussion here demonstrates that the recurrence of male desire in culture avoids this telos in a circularity which is passed from generation to generation. However, like the coalface worker in *Smoke*, the effect of mise en abyme within this culture involves a level of integration which both generates the power for the system at the same time as having a degenerative effect on the individual: the oppressed becomes oppressor in a vicious cycle. Yet while the inevitable outcome for all characters is death, the phallogocentric text goes on. This acts as a symbol of phallogocentrism's ability, unlike man, to continually deflect from its own telos in a system of circularity passed on like 'genes' to the next generation. *Of Parents and Children* ironically reflects this in how it intertexts with Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains*: Josef Somr, the actor who plays the elder father in *Of Parents and Children*, also played Mr Hubička, the experienced philanderer who facilitates Miloš's rendezvous with Viktorie Frei in Menzel's 1966 film. Thus the textual strand continues from Menzel's film into *Of Parents and Children*, with this character embroiled in issues concerning sexual potency.

Thus the walking in circles as 'the most important thing' in the film makes the circularity of phallogocentrism and its deflection from its own final signified of key concern. The grotesque retention of 'old' within 'new' jars with cinematographer Martin Strba's assertion that 'by changing surroundings you can bring up feelings that weren't there' (Michálek, 2008). Strba is talking about changing the socio-political surroundings, but as *Bored in Brno* demonstrates, the 'new' setting retains features pertaining to the 'old' much like the 'new world order' after the flood – since no 'new wave' is going to fully wipe out what went before. This is reflected in Somr's character in the film, who recounts sexual escapades from the past as well as the present, showing that he is no closer to an understanding of romantic love than anyone else in the films. Somr's character also deploys the Pirandellian 'mask' technique to appear as a man of prominent social standing when he

‘doubles’ as doctor to ‘seduce’ a woman. The father is then the butt of the joke when the glamorous woman he has managed to seduce reveals that she is also wearing her own masks of seduction – a wig, false teeth, padding in her bra – at which point male desire is reduced. Thus the revealing of ‘hidden meaning’ inhibits male desire; as with the conditions of a ‘hyperreality’, it becomes ‘too true’ since, as Baudrillard suggests in relation to textual analysis, search for hidden meaning opposes seduction (Baudrillard, 1990: 152). With the inevitability of the cyclical nature of phallogocentrism confronting Czechoslovak and Czech society so sharply since the twilight of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Kunderaesque laughing in the face of adversity which projects from Czech culture appears to be a reaction to the Kafkaesque confines of the various systems of oppression in that time. As František Daniel argues:

To ridicule something, the ironic writer uses characters who convey the appropriate image: people . . . who are seemingly dumb – but only seemingly; who are average from all points of view except their spirit; and who can effectively ridicule those who pretend to be powerful, those who pretend to be wise and pretend to have all the answers (Daniel in Mazierska, 2008: 27).

This thesis has attempted to hold up a mirror to those artists in Czech culture who held up a mirror to society. With the position that the text ceaselessly posits meaning to ceaselessly evaporate it, which Barthes outlines, the ability to laugh in the face of seriousness even in the most dire circumstances demonstrates an ability to subvert and continue to disrupt the system, even under extreme oppression. By showing up those who take themselves most seriously and pretend to have all the answers as the most fit for ridicule, the comic, which is not opposed to the tragic but the same viewed from a different perspective, is inexhaustible. Thus, the archetype of the contemptibly unsatisfactory ‘masculine’ character in the films studied here remains under the conditions of phallogocentric culture. In its latest guise, post-Communism, those masculine characters are still the ones to be laughed at. As with the Biblical Flood, the patriarchs remain after the flood under phallogocentrism. What the

seeming inseparability of Czech culture from phallogocentrism demonstrates, like with the limitations of criticisms of the regime from within the Party during the New Wave, is that all that can be achieved in this vein is to disrupt the status quo, without ever destroying it.

SUMMARY

The argument that the New Wave was an anti-establishment movement which attacked the Communist regime at its core is weakened by Menzel's assertion that the 1960s was the 'ideal time' to make films (Menzel in Buchar, 2004: 38). Gedeon, meanwhile, laments the disconnection between modern filmmakers and the New Wave. One conclusion which can be drawn from this is that filmmaking and filmmakers benefit from an oppressive system. Again, the line between oppressed and oppressors becomes blurry. What the comparison to films after the fall of Communism in this chapter aims to achieve is a demonstration of Czech culture showing a strand which links characters' behaviours through the several auspices of phallogocentric culture from 1918-present. The oppressive forces of capitalism have similar effects on the actions of characters post-Communism to the characters of the New Wave and even before. This link comes out in the use of older settings as allegory, a residual effect of the Communist regime where the authorities could not be directly targeted. By using a Nazi or Inquisition setting to critique the contemporary environment, an acknowledgement of this overlap is already being made. Thus, the overlap from the New Wave to films after Communism in relation to how characters deal with their own 'new wave' of consumerist ideology demonstrates how these periods remain linked under phallogocentrism, thus taking the New Wave out of isolation.

CONCLUSION

Much of the work on the Czechoslovak New Wave in Western scholarship has focused on the phenomenon in isolation. This thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how subversion, or disruption, to the status quo in phallogocentrism is a Czech strand under the enduring auspices of phallogocentric culture. The Czechoslovak reforms of the 1960s saw a political relaxing from the Stalinist 1950s and led to the Prague Spring of 1968. The New Wave occurred during the 1960s until the Prague Spring, and is thus easily conflated with reformist ideals. However, what my approach shows, with regards to the subversion of genre and the disruptive force of an attack on aesthetics of the time, is that the New Wave was less of an attack on the regime than an attack on the existing aesthetics in Czech culture. That a cultural strand existed before, with examples in Franz Kafka, Otakar Vávra and Martin Frič, demonstrates how this is a typically Czech reaction to oppressive forces – what Milan Kundera calls the ‘cunning of the Czech people’ (Kundera, 1985: 101). Three techniques for achieving this aesthetic critique which I have outlined are the deployment of an older setting, a setting elsewhere, and the darkly comic. These deflect the critique the films present from their contemporary socio-political environment, thus offering a chance of being overlooked by strict censorship. I have demonstrated how a precedent was set for these techniques with the examples of Kafka, Vávra and Frič, and how the influences of these figures are felt deeply in the New Wave.

The second chapter here has also demonstrated the fluidity of the timescale for the New Wave, with Juraj Herz’s *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1968) and Karel Kachyna’s *The Ear* (*Ucho*, 1970) appearing after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 (and both being banned almost immediately upon completion). By outlining film production dating from before the New Wave, then examining films of the New Wave in the first chapter, then the hinge of the New Wave and the start of the period of Normalization in the second chapter, I

have attempted to demonstrate how this strand reflects the theme of Kafkaesque blurring of the lines evident in these films. The third chapter's examination of films coming after the fall of Communism is an attempt to demonstrate how these concerns to do with overarching socio-political environments continues to affect filmmakers into the present day.

Saša Gedeon's assertion that the New Wave was 'united by opposition against the regime' (Gedeon in Buchar, 2004: 31) is at odds with prominent New Wave director Jiří Menzel's argument that the 1960s was the 'ideal time' (Menzel in Buchar, 2004: 38). For Forman, the attack was against the Socialist Realist aesthetic of the time, which he saw as idiotic (Forman in *Facets Cinémathèque*, 2008), and this attack is reflected from Frič's *Hard Life of an Adventurer* (*Těžký život dobrodruha*, 1941) to Kachyna's *The Ear*. This is also reflected in films coming after the fall of Communism, with the 'sarcastic films' Gedeon describes linking the darkly comic strand (Gedeon in Buchar, 2004: 32).

The Kafkaesque sense of a comic/tragic overlap which underpins the films discussed in this thesis is brought out in the depiction of Czech characters being able to benefit from oppressive forces, part of Kundera's 'Czech cunning'. The comic aspect allows viewers to laugh in the face of adversity; however, as Henri Bergson demonstrates, comedy has a greater function in society than to provide humour (Bergson, 1999: 13). By laughing at a character like Kopfrkingl, for instance, the viewer is serving a corrective function: his automaton-like demeanour makes his proliferation of the Nazi ideology laughable, and the warning is that the same might be said for those trying to promote themselves under the contemporary Communist regime. Again, what marks the success of this and other works deploying 'older' settings to deflect the immediacy of their criticism is that, through figuration, these themes can be applied to global concerns over various socio-political spheres. Yet this success also augments the argument that opposition is merely disruption, rather than destruction, since it is not aimed at any distinct regime; instead, this kind of disruption is an operation under

phallogocentric culture which helps to edify its structures by bringing on ‘new waves’ of ideology, thus postponing telos indefinitely. These overlaps between various eras under phallogocentric culture demonstrate how Kundera’s Czech cunning is a means for dealing with oppressive forces: the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Kafka); Nazism (Frič); Communism (New Wave); consumerism (Velvet Generation) – all of the examples here show how Czech concerns over dealing with oppressive forces occur under any period in phallogocentric culture, making the perception of an oppressed people more nuanced. By benefiting from the socio-political conditions of any period, the question is: do they help to edify their own oppressive conditions? The answers offered in films like *The Cremator* and *The Ear* would appear to be yes.

In all of the examples presented here, the focus has been on how the presentation of Czech characters in relation to their own oppression holds significance with regards to blurring the lines between the oppressed and oppressors. This has ramifications with regards to the idea of guilt and where it ultimately lies: with the invading floods of ideology or with the supposedly oppressed of those ideologies themselves. By supporting arguments with post-structuralist theory I have attempted to demonstrate how subversion from within any phallogocentric mode of culture only causes a series of disruptions, rather than destruction, to the status quo.

Characters in this study from Charles Crispin in Frič’s *Hard Life of an Adventurer* to Karel Kopřivský in Herz’s *The Cremator* demonstrate a level of cunning in relation to their own oppression which facilitates their own success. Thus, the narrative proffered by the two young women in Věra Chytilová’s *Daisies* (*Sedmikrásky*, 1966), for example, or by Miloš Hruša in *Closely Observed Trains* (*Ostře sledované vlaky*, 1966), act not as destructive forces towards the overarching authorities under phallogocentrism, but rather as a series of

disruptions from *within* those metanarratives – thus unavoidably contributing to that narrative and in doing so helping to edify its structure.

Another question this raises is whether Czech characters are doomed to repeat their mistakes. The recurrent theme of inept male characters who struggle to function in their own world (from Kafka to the modern day) suggest that the structures in place upholding phallogocentric culture are too contrived to avoid. The theme of new waves of ideology sweeping in, purporting to have washed away previous conditions, all contain the residue of ‘old’ under phallogocentrism, which is deeply felt in the Communism hangover of the films of the Velvet Generation. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate how no ‘new wave’, just as Barthes argues in relation to narrative, is ever truly original. Like the Barthesian narrative, it is woven into the fabric of phallogocentric culture. Thus, the Czechoslovak New Wave, as a thread in the fabric of Czech culture, should not be treated as an isolated occurrence ‘united by its opposition against the regime’.

When Antonín Jaroslav Liehm argued that ‘Kundera once wrote that Stalinist socialism allowed us to see sides of human character we sometimes sensed but haven’t seen or refused to see’ and that ‘[h]istorians, sociologists, philosophers and artists owe us answers to the questions these facts present’ (A.J. Liehm in Buchar, 2004: 2-3), my response has been to interrogate these questions. While much work still has to be done in this area – notably with regards to films produced in Czechoslovakia during the period of Normalization in conjunction with the theme of this thesis – my project has been concerned with bringing these questions into light.

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