

FARCE AFTER VELVET:
SATIRICAL PROGRAMMES IN THE FIRST
YEARS OF CZECH PUBLIC TELEVISION

By

Ivana Průchová

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of History

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Marsha Siefert

Second reader: Dr. Oksana Sarkisova

Budapest, Hungary

2019

Statement of Copyright

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I analyse the post-socialist satirical production which ran on the Czech public service television in the 1990s. Firstly, I investigate the changes which were taking place in the field of television organisation and production and attend to outline how these changes were reflected in the public debates. Secondly, this thesis seeks to shed light on the genealogy of particular kind of satirical performances by looking at the cultural milieu of Prague amateur theatre groups. It then elaborates on how these groups entered the field of television and film production and what were the factors providing that the alternative creative practice was given support and space in the Czech television programme scheme.

My theoretical perspective is shaped by the approaches of production studies and I namely apply the concepts of social and cultural mediation when inquiring into the production context. I complement the analysis by accounting for the situated aesthetics and ethics of the programmes under study. A particular theoretical relevance is given to the consideration of satirical genre and its critical contribution to the post-socialist democratic practice. The thesis stresses the relevance of post-socialist television satirical formats by arguing that the analysed programmes provided an unsettling reading of the post-socialist media representations and addressed the ambiguities and discrepancies of the contemporary public discourses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is about the after-Velvet condition. It is about people who, by performing farce, took democracy seriously. However, it only could have been written thanks to the people who were keen on taking the farce seriously by performing such a great level of support. First of all, I want to thank Professor Marsha Siefert for being always there for many her students, for acknowledging our curiosity and intellectual styles, and for being enthusiastically fond and critical at the same time. I also remain indebted to my colleagues and friends who have been my partners in the inspiring conversations and subtle ridicule—especially to Kuba and Lucy.

Equally importantly I want to thank my second reader Oksana Sarkisova, my academic writing instructors Tom Rooney and Mike, and Professor Balázs Trencsényi for their insights. They were among the first readers and based on their remarks, I rearranged the thesis into hopefully a more coherent text.

Finally, let me celebrate Ivan Vyskočil, Petr Čtvrtníček, and Štěpán Veselský whose unsettling humour I love and thanks to whom I discovered that the truth most worthy of defending is the truth of ironical laughter.

Table of contents

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
Table of contents	iv
Table or Illustrations	vi
List of Abbreviations	vii
Introduction: Farce is the Genre of Democracy	1
1. Television and Historical Analysis.....	12
1.1. Concepts	16
1.2. Sources.....	25
2. Running of Unconsolidated TV	30
2.1. The Garage Revolt.....	30
2.2. Public Service Act(ion!)	34
2.2.1. From State Dependency to Public Service	35
2.2.2. Making of the Dual Media System.....	48
2.2.3. Shattered Cinema Sheltered.....	58
3. Inform, Educate and Entertain Unsettle!.....	66
3.1. Trajectory of the satirical performances on Czech Television.....	68
3.2. Celebration of the Death Anniversary	70
3.3. Mystification Is the Only Sincere Attitude	74
3.4. Fero Fenič Intervenes—the Success Story	79
4. Czech Soda: Democracy Exam.....	88
4.1. Ascension of The Cellar	88
4.2. Three Nice (Non-)Events Just Before the Return of History	94
4.3. Hang-Over Treatment: Branding Czech Soda	104
4.3.1. Distaste On-Air.....	107
4.3.2. “We Are Sorry to Interfere in the TV Commercial Programme”	111

4.3.3. The Bat Reflects on Sensitive Issues	118
4.3.4. “Because the Filth is Ingrained”	129
4.3.5. Alles Gute!	136
Conclusion	143
Bibliography	146

Table or Illustrations

Figure 1. The Purge: Václav Klaus, the leader of Civic Democratic Platform, undergoes spraying to get rid of fleas. Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, Vávra and Laufer present, CT, June 25, 1999. Screenshot from Youtube.	3
Figure 2. The third episode of Czech Soda premiered on CT1 at 9.40 pm, July 3, 1993. It was annotated as “a third nationwide test of democracy.” In Týdeník Televize no. 27 (1993), 26.	29
Figure 3. David Vávra and Milan Šteindler—two classmates who founded Sklep. Photograph by Petr Beneš.	88
Figure 4. Petr Čtvrtníček in the amateur film Problematika produced in 1988 by Krásný film. Screenshot from YouTube.	103
Figure 6. Petr Čtvrtníček alias TV news presenter in the sixteenth episode of Czech Soda. He informs about the exclusive shots which show the first lady half-naked. Czech Soda, CT, August 6, 1997. Screenshot from YouTube.	113
Figures 7 & 8. Petr Čtvrtníček and Karl with bats starring in the Klub Netopýr programme. Czech Soda, CT, July 8, 1995, Screenshots from Youtube.	119
Figure 9. František Ringo Čech standing for a small Czech in the eighth episode of Czech Soda. Czech Soda, CT, March 14, 1994. Screenshot from YouTube.	125
Figure 10. A commercial which advertises MečJar—the detergent applicable to personal files in the State Police register. Czech Soda, CT, June 4, 1993. Screenshot from YouTube.	133
Figure 11. “Buy Czech Products!” Czech Soda, CT, August, 18, 1993. Screenshot from YouTube.	136
Figure 12. Egon (on the left) and Karl “looking around” the West German supermarket. Czech Soda, CT, July 31, 1993. Screenshot from Youtube.	138
Figure 13 & 14. Karl appropriating money to compensate old uncle Karl. Czech Soda, CT, June 10, 1994. Screenshots from YouTube.	141
Figures 15, 16 & 17. The transient monuments on the Letná Hill. J. V. Stalin (on the left), Václav Klaus (upper right) and Petr Čtvrtníček (bottom right). Source: http://letenskaplan.webgarden.cz (Fig. 15), CT24 (Fig. 16 & 17).	144

List of Abbreviations

CST - Československá televize/Československá televízia (Czechoslovak Television)

CT - Česká televize (Czech Television)

EBU - European Broadcasting Union

FAMU - Filmová a televizní fakulta Akademie múzických umění v Praze (Film and TV Faculty
of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague)

FEBIO - Feničův biograf (Cinema of Fenič)

OIRT - International Radio and Television Organisation

RRTV - Rada pro rozhlasové a televizní vysílání (Council for Radio and Television
Broadcasting)

Introduction: Farce is the Genre of Democracy

“Truth and Love Must Prevail over Lies and Hatred.”¹

“Latin poets used the term ‘intermundia’ to describe inhospitable spaces between the worlds [...]. In democracy, the only words that matter are those which are capable of drawing us into the uninhabited spaces between the constituted versions of the world. Democracy can perform well only if a sufficient number of people sets out to these inhospitable in-between spaces. [...] I believe that our postmodern age is about diverging from settled paths.”²

I was born in 1993 to parents who watched commercial TV Nova rather than the public service TV. On rare occasions, my dad switched to public service Czech Television. One of these occasions was the time slot in which the satirical programme *Czech Soda* was broadcast. Being still small, I was not able to distinguish between the real and satirical versions of TV news, programmes, and commercials. When I decided to investigate the televisual image of the 1990s in retrospect, I rediscovered programmes which I remembered from my childhood or from the memory of my family. Watching these post-socialist TV formats, I found it difficult to take these programmes at face value. How could contemporary viewers fit together Havel’s speeches, the promotion of investment funds, and *Dallas*? Why did so many programme formats from the state-socialist era retain mass popularity and continue well into the post-socialist years, while there was a dominant tendency in the political sphere to deal with the past by drawing clear-cut

¹ Václav Havel’s revolutionary programme from December 1989.

² Václav Bělohradský, “Přemítání o Havlově přemítání,” *Literární noviny*, November 14, 1991, cited in Václav Bělohradský, *Kapitalismus a občanské ctnosti* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992), 126. All the translations from Czech are mine unless otherwise indicated.

lines?³ In other words, I wondered how one could make coherent statements about the discursive framework of the 1990s in the context of post-socialist Czech Republic if one was to choose television as a source.

While I was watching the post-socialist TV programmes, I found one genre whose language was familiar to me but its appearance on television was limited to the first post-socialist decade. Nothing of this sort ran on state-socialist Czechoslovak television and it had disappeared again by the year 2000. This genre had to do with satire but it was dissimilar to the genre of cabaret forms associated with the pre-socialist and socialist era. While these older genres found their way into post-socialist TV just like Olga Lipińska's cabaret⁴ in Poland or János Gálvölgyi's *Heti Hetes* (The Weekly Seven)⁵ in Hungary, I saw no association of the emergent satirical formats on CT with these already "established" cabaret performances. As I watched this "other" satire, it finally dawned on me that the only coherent way of reconciling the paradoxical, yet co-existing discourses of early Czech post-socialism was to approach them through the prism of farce.

³ See Adéla Gjuričová, *Rozdělení minulostí: vytváření politických identit v České republice po roce 1989* (Prague: Knihovna Václava Havla, 2011).

⁴ Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 234—237.

⁵ Anikó Imre, "The Witty Seven: Late Socialist-Capitalist Satire in Hungary," *Popular Communication* 10, no. 1—2 (2012), 131—144.



Figure 1. The Purge: Václav Klaus, the leader of *Civic Democratic Platform*, undergoes spraying to get rid of fleas. Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, Vávra and Laufer present, CT, June 25, 1999. Screenshot from Youtube.⁶

This thesis aims to reveal the trajectory of this “other” satire while also outlining the context in which the genre operated. It first sets about to contextualise the situation of Czech public television and the Czech film industry in the years following the 1989 regime change. It proposes that the emergence of this specific satirical genre was linked to the post-socialist transformation of television and therefore it deals with the related structural processes in the Chapter 2. In this chapter, I discuss the processes of federalisation and demonopolisation of TV while also elaborating on the implementation of new operational paradigm which transformed state television into an institution of public service. I touch upon the tumult within the professional

⁶ “Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, Vávra a Laufer uvádějí,” YouTube, 18:20, June 18, 2011, accessed May 31, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SILEm_qEtU4.

field of film and television workers that resulted from state austerity policies, denationalisation, and the emergence of private production companies.

In Chapter 3, I trace the trajectory of the satirical genre on Czech television (CT). I show that the existing entertainment formats were assessed as unsatisfying by the editors of the CT weekly journal and that there was a search for a new satirical format to run on CT. I proceed to explaining the context and satirical aesthetics of the 1992 film *Don Gio* of which CT was a coproducer. I connect *Don Gio* with the cultural scene of Prague amateur theatres and thus establish my argument that the new satirical aesthetics originated within the situated aesthetics of Prague amateur theatre groups. I support it with the example of *Studio Kroměříž* programme, which ran on CT between 1992—1993 and was presented as a genre of TV debate while it rather was a parodical mystification thereof. I finally bring in the context of changing production patterns by turning my attention to the emergence of the production company *FEBIO*, which pioneered several new formats in cooperation with CT. The contextualisation of *FEBIO* and the introduction of its founder Fero Fenič builds the bridge between this and the following chapter.

Chapter 4's entire focus is on the satirical series *Czech Soda* which ran on CT between 1993 and 1997. It introduces the genealogy of the programme by engaging in the earlier creative practices of its main protagonists and thus tries to link the late-socialist alternative cultural production with the post-socialist prominent TV programme. It then provides general characteristics of the genre and clarifies how these series were produced and in what way CT dealt with controversies that arose after first episodes had been screened. The remaining sections of the chapter are analytical and interpret selected sketches of *Czech Soda*. The analysis is based on the notion that *Czech Soda* satirical operation was parodying not only the particular genres

but post-socialist TV as a genre in itself. This was done by imitating the programme flow, questioning the truth claims of TV news, and mocking the increasing commercialisation of TV and media in general.

The thesis focuses on the first post-socialist years which saw vast structural changes both within television and film industry. The motivation behind choosing this timeframe comes from the design of my inquiry which attends to situating the unsettling post-socialist aesthetics as being connected with the reorganisations of Czechoslovak and Czech creative industries. However, it also accounts for the cultural continuities and institutional legacies and sees the post-socialist development in its historical situatedness.

In the remainder of the introduction, I want to elaborate on the genre of satire, whose analysis will be the subject of this thesis. I consider this genre's importance to lie in its self-reflexivity and argue for looking at this genre through the prism of post-socialist democratic practice. This genre played a noticeable role in the post-socialist public service media culture and it needs to be assessed as a constitutive part of public discourse which kept addressing the facets of post-socialist development throughout the 1990s.

I characterise the genre as standing for “a postmodern satire” and hereby associate it specifically with the theories of Peter Sloterdijk, Alexei Yurchak, and Václav Bělohradský. What these thinkers have in common is that they explain the functioning of the dominant (late socialist or late capitalist) ideology by inquiring into the genre of ideological subversion. My definition of the postmodern satire is inspired by their insights in three respects. It includes the operation of kynical reason, the strategy of overidentification, and the notion of farce being the representative genre of democracy.

I consider the Czech postmodern TV satire to occupy what Peter Sloterdijk would call a kynical position in the post-socialist discourse in that it stands for both an a priori mistrust and enthusiasm of hope. In accordance with Sloterdijk, I envision the position of kynicism as being different from cynicism in that it is not based on pretence and hypocritical gestures. Whereas cynicism is a universal skepticism towards present condition as well as a mistrust towards better alternatives, kynicism is defined by Sloterdijk as “a cheeky subversive practice that uses joking, profanity, humiliation, and mocking for a morally regulative purpose.”⁷ While kynicism poses a belief in truth by its practice, the truth remains unsituated since it cannot be “accessed.” The truth is rather alluded to and sought after. The kynical attitude is modern in that it postulates ethical impulse, yet this impulse represents a work in progress or remains beyond reach. The postmodern aspect of kynicism prevails in that it is self-aware, ironical, and suspicious of articulating the alternative while ridiculing the current state.⁸ The envisioned, yet inarticulate ethics, led Sloterdijk to conclude that kynicism lacks capacities in the current postmodern condition to bring forward an alternative construction of social relations and that the dominant mode of ideology in the late 20th century is that of cynicism.⁹ Slavoj Žižek later subscribed to Sloterdijk’s assumption but he also pointed out a particular mode of discursive subversion which was in position to break with the status quo nihilism inherent in the cynical consciousness. In his view, there was one particularly effective variation of kynicism—that of taking the cynically operating ideology at an utmost face value by an enthusiastic restoration of emptied ideological

⁷ Rebecca Higgie, “Kynical dogs and cynical masters: Contemporary satire, politics and truth-telling,” *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 27, no. 2 (2014): 185.

⁸ Higgie, “Kynical dogs”: 192.

⁹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (London: Verso, 1988).

containers. Although Žižek was referring to the late capitalist ideological condition, Alexei Yurchak applied Žižek's insight to elucidate the process of disintegration of Soviet hegemony of representation.¹⁰

In his book *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More*,¹¹ Yurchak elaborates on the genre of “stiob” to account for the thriving aesthetics which negotiated with the late socialist ideological discourse. “Stiob” was a genre of absurd humour which avoided cynical attitudes. Rather, it showed such a great degree of identification “with the object, person, or idea at which it was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two.”¹² Yurchak links the genre of “stiob” with the circulation of highly formalised language in the Soviet official sphere. The formalisation of language led in his view to the epistemic alienation from its semantic meaning and to the shift in communicative practice. The official discourse ceased to work as a constative, revealing tool and instead it became a performative practice through which people acted in a sanctioned socialist manner while pursuing divergent agendas.¹³ Under this condition, the overidentification, in other words the sincere adherence to the semantic labyrinth of late socialist phraseology, “sent a more potent critical signal (one articulated in the language of form itself) than any revelatory exposé or gesture of ironic diminishment could have.”¹⁴ While unsettling, the overidentification of “stiob”

¹⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 282—297.

¹¹ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.

¹² Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, cited in Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak, “American Stiob: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveals about Contemporary Political Culture in the West,” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 181.

¹³ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, cited in Boyer and Yurchak, “American Stiob”: 182.

¹⁴ Boyer and Yurchak, “American Stiob”: 182.

had not so much to do with an oppositional position towards the ridiculed subject. Rather, it pointed to the discursive hypocrisy of the late socialist social contract which was based on what Sloterdijk called “enlightened false consciousness to ideology.”¹⁵ It exposed the situation in which nobody believed in the truthfulness of the dominant ideology and yet everyone acted as if the ideology was the true face of reality rather than its mask. The conformism of cynical subscription to what was considered a false ideology was shown as consisting of the double-layered resignation—not only was one unable to confront the dominant ideology, one was also unable to confront “one’s own simulated support of this ideology.”¹⁶

Yurchak’s elaboration on the sensibility of late Soviet “stib” has proved useful in studying late capitalist culture, too.¹⁷ In this thesis, I will touch upon the situated overidentification aesthetics which had developed within Prague theatre culture during state socialism. Subsequently I will focus on how, due to the regime change of 1989, this aesthetics moved from a marginal position towards nationwide scope since its practitioners were given quite a prominent time slot on the public service television channels. I am therefore going to outline the process of how the marginal aesthetics of the late state socialism became trans-mediated into television and interacted with the new, reconfigured context of post-socialist transformation. The examples which will be analysed include much of the above-mentioned aesthetic and ethical aspects.

¹⁵ Alexei Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretence, and the Anekdot,” *Public Culture* 9, no. 2 (1997): 178.

¹⁶ Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason”: 178.

¹⁷ See Boyer and Yurchak, “American Stib.”

Yet more insight is needed to understand how the postmodern satirical production of Czech public television related to the vibrant discursive situations of post-socialism, by which I primarily mean the conceptualisations and representations of democracy, capitalism, and Czech identity. The way postmodern satire dealt with the post-socialist condition shapes the design of my inquiry. While I suggest that this genre provided one of the most impressive critical readings of the “after-Velvet” development, I need to underline that the unsettling television performances came out of kynical ethics rather than from the cynical positions. The framing of the postmodern satire on post-socialist CT was about doubt, disenchantment, and ridicule as standing for a lesson of democratic practice. The reason behind doubting and ridiculing the realities of Czech post-socialist democracy was motivated by a postmodern fondness towards democracy. The postmodern satirists defended the notion of truth and love but they did so paradoxically by dismantling the emerging truths and ridiculing the pathos. Their truth and love resided in between the established versions of the worlds, in “intermundia.”

To understand how hope and idealism get realised through unsettling and divergence, let me discuss one Czech postmodern philosopher who was very serious about his philosophising back in the early 1990s, while at the same time postulating that truth resided in unserious, equivocal, nomadic conduct.¹⁸ Václav Bělohradský would argue that the postmodern philosopher should act in exact opposition to the task defined by Plato. Rather than informing us about the real, fixed world outside of the cave, the task of the postmodern philosophy is to intervene once there are attempts to get the world fixed by absolute terms and ideal types. In 1991, he wrote that “the only words that matter are those which are capable of drawing us into the uninhabited

¹⁸ Václav Bělohradský, *Přirozený svět jako politický problém: Eseje o člověku pozdní doby* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991), 218.

spaces between the constituted versions of the world.”¹⁹ In locating the meaningful words in the unsettled, in-between spaces, Bělohradský sought to avoid ossification of truth into a pathetic genre. He conceived of truth as being ephemeral, roaming around, and always implicit. Truth could neither be proposed nor declared although it related to absolute verdicts and objective notions in that the absolutist claims were preconditions for truth’s ironic laughter.²⁰ Bělohradský thus associated the truth with the ironical commentary surrounding the absolutist claims and thus situated truth as operating in the dialectics. Drawing on the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka, he situated the true meaning as standing outside the teleological narratives and enshrined principles: “The [postmodern] philosophers do not want to be functionaries of humankind. Rather, they wish to be the nomads of humankind. They want to problematise the notion that there is a coherent historical trajectory, absolute principles and a sense of pursuing goals.”²¹ According to Bělohradský, this teleological meta-narrative was an inherent characteristic of what he classified as totalitarian regimes. Totalitarian regimes needed strong teleology which would provide for their legitimacy. While he associated totalitarian regimes with the genre of lyric and tragic pathos under which violent means could become justified by pointing to higher goals, he brought in the notion of farce when accounting for the genre of democracy: “Farce is the genre of democracy. It is this incoherent, ambiguous, chaotic everydayness. [...] We must appreciate

¹⁹ Bělohradský, “Přemítání o Havlově přemítání,” cited in Bělohradský, *Kapitalismus*, 126.

²⁰ Here I draw on Bělohradský’s reflection in 2004 documentary *Nikdo neposlouchá* directed by Robert Sedláček . See “Václav Bělohradský: Nikdo neposlouchá,” Česká televize, 58:29, 2004, accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1181831094-vaclav-belohradsky-nikdo-neposloucha/20456226263/>.

²¹ Bělohradský, *Přirozený svět*, 218.

this farce. [...] Those people who come and claim values and want us set free from the farce are about to cast us into tragic epos.”²²

In the similar spirit, Bělohradský wrote in 1991: Let’s put the angels aside—that is the imperative of the post-modern civil society.”²³ Ironically or not, after putting his angels aside, the next thing Bělohradský did was to help Václav Klaus in drafting the political programme for the 1992 elections.²⁴ Klaus’ party won the majority of the votes and greatly defined the post-socialist political life. While Klaus was introducing the iron principles of market economy and encouraging people to tighten their belts, an ironical television commentary kept confronting his claims.

* * *

Watching the programmes which used to run on the 1990s’ public television, I was unable to abandon the in-between space. The only genre which was thus in a position to provide me with a ground for arguments about Czech post-socialism was farce. Tracing farce on Czech public television turned out to be a stable ground for this thesis to unfold.

²² See “Václav Bělohradský: Nikdo neposlouchá,” Česká televize, 58:29, 2004, accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1181831094-vaclav-belohradsky-nikdo-neposloucha/20456226263/>.

²³ Václav Bělohradský, introduction to *Přirozený svět*, 10.

²⁴ Bohumil Pečinka, “Václav Bělohradský: Života bído, tady mě máš,” *Reflex*, date and year not specified, accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.czsk.net/svet/clanky/osobnosti/belohradsky.html>.

1. Television and Historical Analysis

Perhaps paradoxically, at a time when television has lost its prominence and more and more people switch to social media, recent years have seen a new wave of interest in television studies. In the context of Central Eastern Europe, the paradigms and perspectives in the field of television studies have significantly shifted and evolved.²⁵ The media cultures in Central Eastern Europe are no longer predominantly approached via the normative prism of transition studies, which looked at the level to which the concerned countries succeeded in developing their media systems into full-fledged pluralist, decentralised landscapes which enhance free speech, tolerance, and liberal democratic values. Several scholars have pointed out that this approach is highly teleological and presupposes a certain set of normative developments which it then uniformly applies to what in fact are historically contingent trajectories and divergent post-socialist multifaceted dynamics.²⁶ This approach was furthermore affected by Cold War thinking and by the “end of history”²⁷ post-Cold War imagination, in that it assumed that the installation of a liberal democratic institutional infrastructure would sooner or later result in adherence to Western patterns of development.²⁸

²⁵ Jan Jiráček, Barbara Köpplová, and Denisa Kasl Kollmannová, eds., *Média dvacet let poté* (Prague: Portál, 2009).

²⁶ See Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism*; Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower, 2003), 16–17; Dina Iordanova, “East Europe’s Cinema Industries Since 1989: Financing Structure and Studios,” *Javnost - The Public* 6, no. 2 (2014): 45–60.

²⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

²⁸ “Communication scholars approached the changing media landscapes armed with concepts derived from democratisation, civil society, and public sphere theory, only to find that that the reality fell short of established ideals and thresholds.” In Sabina Mihelj, “Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe: Between Cold War Politics and Global Developments,” in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe during and since Socialism*, ed. Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens, and Kati Lustyik (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 14.

Recent scholarship aims not only to criticise the traces of theoretical hegemonism in this approach but also introduces alternative media theories which treat the local media histories in a more appropriate manner.²⁹ Moreover, the emerging field which focuses on the socialist media systems, socialist television, and post-socialist ambiguities helps to historicise the dominant Western narratives. These narratives analyse the media systems based on categories, which are historically and spatially specific to the Western world but tend to colonise the thinking about other types of media cultures. Scholars of socialist and post-socialist media systems do not reject what has been done in the Western scholarship but rather aim to re-evaluate the field by redeeming the neglected specificities of the other media systems.³⁰ Similarly to those who regard the history of state socialism as an alternative modernity, scholars like Anikó Imre argue that socialist television (and other media) generated distinctive cultures, which cannot be analysed by means of ready-made categories and through a single paradigm.³¹ Rather, the analysis should go hand in hand with contextualisation; without the reflection of local cultural histories, one cannot

²⁹ See for example Anikó Imre, *Identity Games: Globalisation and the Transformation of Media Cultures in the New Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

³⁰ Dina Iordanova and Petr Szczepanik emphasise the crucial role which the film units in Poland and later in Hungary, and the creative units in Czechoslovakia played for the organisation of creative work: Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*; Petr Szczepanik, “Between Units and Producers. Organisation of Creative Work in Czechoslovak State Cinema 1945–1990” in *Film Units: Restart*, ed. Marcin Adameczak, Piotr Marecki, and Marcin Malatyński (Cracow: Ha!art, 2012): 273–311. Other specificity is linked to the term *dramaturgy*. In Czechoslovakia, and possibly in other state-socialist film industries, “*dramaturgie* encompass[ed] all of the literary preparation and screenwriting connected with a film project. At the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s, *dramaturgie* encompassed also some competences which today are associated with the producer’s work: participation in casting and selecting crew members, and artistic supervision over every level of production, and sometimes even over distribution.” In Petr Szczepanik, “Between Units and Producers: Organisation of Creative Work in Czechoslovak State Cinema 1945–1990” in *Film Units: Restart* ed., Marcin Adameczak, Piotr Marecki, Marcin Malatyński (Cracow: Ha!art, 2012), 273.

³¹ Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism*, 10–14. See also Irena Reifová and Tereza Pavlíčková, “Invisible Audiences: Structure and Agency in Post-socialist Media Studies,” *Media Studies* 2 (2013): 133.

fully grasp the delicate interplay of the ideological shifts, media policies, and the positions of experts and creative units in the field of media industry under state socialism and after.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider the liberal democratic and state-socialist media systems as distinct, autonomous entities which operate in isolation. Mihelj argues for the need to analyse the coexisting media systems through a perspective which focuses on mutual relations, negotiations, and entangled developments.³² Aside from coproductions and various imports, one can also think of the ideological liaisons and shared dilemmas of television broadcasters on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Mihelj shows that the insistence on education and cultivation of the populace was common both to Western European and Eastern European broadcasters:

In socialist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, didacticism and paternalist attitudes may have been more persistent, and more closely tied to specifically socialist and anti-capitalist attitudes, but at their core, the cultural values that underpinned the work of early television professionals everywhere were similar. Thanks to the institutionalisation of broadcasting as a public service across most of Western Europe, such values continued to exert influence throughout the Cold War.³³

This shared belief that television should educate and cultivate the masses via transmission of high culture also meant that professionals on both sides found themselves in a difficult situation and had to come up with similar concessions. As the polls which were conducted among television audiences since the beginning of such measurements showed, television was sought after primarily as a source of entertainment and relaxation, while the educational and high-profile

³² Sabina Mihelj, “Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe: Between Cold War Politics and Global Developments,” in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe during and since Socialism*, ed. Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens, Kati Lustyik (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 15–18.

³³ Sabina Mihelj, “Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe,” 21.

cultural programmes were at the very bottom of the viewers' interests.³⁴ The share of entertainment programming increased both in Western and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, although for differing reasons. Western public broadcasters competed for audiences with the emerging commercial broadcasters while in some state-socialist countries this was an indicator of the more general trends of socialist consumerism and privatisation of the public sphere.³⁵ In both cases though, it was a strategy employed to gain popular legitimacy. In the West, public broadcasters struggled to maintain their position at the vanguard of cultural education because they continued to believe in the irreplaceability of the public service mission. In the East, media were serving the state apparatus and the amalgamation of highbrow and middlebrow programming into socialist TV entertainment went hand in hand with the party policies which pursued new, demobilised forms of social consensus.

Thus, bringing forward the idea that non-Western media cultures deserve theorising on their own, the scholars of the East Central European socialist media landscape rush to add that, among many differences, it is worthwhile to engage with the interaction both within the Eastern Bloc and between East and West. Without dismissing the political context and the power constellation under specific circumstances, it is important to underpin the non-Western perspectives, which analyse how the contingencies of local set-ups determine the practices of creative translation of genres and media formats from elsewhere. Additionally, this can also help us to investigate transnational cooperation by means of a different paradigm: one which is

³⁴ Sabina Mihelj, "Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe," 17–18.

³⁵ This is shown by Paulina Bren who studied the development towards these trends in Czechoslovakia. See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 159.

agency-oriented in that it focuses on the biographies of local actors who manoeuvre within and are contingent on the local institutional, cultural, and—in a broader sense—political structures.

1.1. Concepts

By changing the focus from media apparatuses and their dominant ideologies to how individuals and collectives within these apparatuses interpreted ordained policies, institutional constellation, and socio-ideological context into creative practices, I want this thesis to follow in the footsteps of Georgina Born's theoretical approach which links ethnographic methods to production studies. Born's most influential ethnographic research was conducted on the BBC and the French music institution IRCAM (*Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*). Her studies of these two institutions not only show her deep engagement as an ethnographic observer but also are strongly theoretically underpinned by her readings of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. Quite comprehensively, her studies are a combination of the genealogical method established by the former and the field theory established by the latter. Yet, in contrast to Foucault and Bourdieu, she does not fully refrain from using aesthetic assessments and therefore does not reduce art merely to the social mechanisms of (class) distinction.³⁶ It is essential for her approach that she “attends to the historical specificity of each institution or genre, and combines social and aesthetic analysis, to shed light on the social logic of creative-decision making and artistic or media innovation.”³⁷ Born's conjunction of social and aesthetic analysis with regard to creative

³⁶ More on Bourdieu's theory of class distinction: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

³⁷ Petr Szczepanik, “On the Ethnography of Media Production: An Interview with Georgina Born,” *Illuminace* 25, no. 3 (2013): 99.

practices linked to a specific institutional environment helped me to conceptualise the engagement with my research topic and will therefore frame this thesis.

Three concepts offer particular guidance here. The first is the concept of **mediation**, which Born took from Alfred Gell's anthropology of art. This concept offers inclusive sensibility through which one can study "a wide range of social, material, and temporal factors that are entailed in production." The practice of mediation interacts with multiple **situated aesthetics** and **ethics**, which need to be understood in their historical dimensions.³⁸ These situated aesthetics and ethics might relate to local, national, and transnational media cultures. Additionally, as I will argue, these aesthetics and ethics do not necessarily have to be linked to a specific media culture but make use of several media formats and artistic practices. Here I focus on the specific aesthetics and ethics which were not so much situated within one particular institution but were rather grounded in the informal artistic and personal networks of late socialism and early post-socialism, whose activities unfolded by means of various media practices.

Although my analysis will be mostly concerned with how these situated informal networks participated in the public television and cultivated their practice into television production, I will constantly point to the trans-media genealogy and broader context of their situated aesthetics and ethics. In line with Born, I consider the television and other institutional and organisational forms (film industry, theatre) to be social mediations of creative practices³⁹ which are culturally, temporally, and locally contingent. Therefore, my analysis will address the interplay between organisational forms of production and historical trajectories of discursive and

³⁸ Petr Szczepanik, "On the Ethnography of Media Production," 100.

³⁹ Petr Szczepanik, "On the Ethnography of Media Production," 106.

genre art forms. The institutional and other structural arrangements stand for the *situatedness* of the production. They attest to the possibilities as well as to the limits which determine how creative practice is pursued and communicated in the given historical context. Furthermore, there is a temporal and spatial aspect to the situatedness, or something we can call genealogies of creative practices and cultural forms. Both creative practices and cultural forms/genres have their genealogies in that they are assemblages of socio-cultural knowledge, which, again, is historically contingent and consists of a set of discursive repertoires, canons, and value systems. Only when keeping all these facets of situatedness in mind, can one understand the dynamics that shapes the aesthetic considerations which underlie creative acts.

My decision to theoretically engage with the approach(es) of production studies has been motivated by the fact that this perspective is pioneering in many respects. The most important aspect inherent to the approach is that it challenges the paradigm of individual authorship and revisits the hierarchies which are implied within the production units. It considers the final product, be it a TV show or a film, to be a collective work shaped by a combination of several authorial investments. Whereas “film and media industry histories tend to focus on organisational structures, political institutions, or influential individuals”⁴⁰ production studies’ defined interest lies in the production units as communities. The production communities are thus seen as bearers of filmmaking culture⁴¹ which contrasts the commonplace views that identified the filmmaking culture to be either originating from individual talents (take the cult of phenomenal male directors) or from a distinct institutional environment. The reorientation

⁴⁰ Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau, introduction to *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

⁴¹ Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau, introduction to *Behind the Screen*, 4.

towards production communities relates back to Born's concept of social mediation in that it connects the institutional structure with individual and collective agency when analysing creative practices. It provides conceptual framing for thinking of the audiovisual output as being intrinsically linked to the mix of individual subjectivities and collective involvement which is channelled via a particular institutional setting. Similar theoretical underpinning was developed by the sociologists of art who argued for a fairer integration of the social context of creative practice into the discipline of art history.

Since the 1989 transformation, important changes have been introduced to the institutional structure of broadcasting in Czechoslovakia, and chapter 2 traces how these changes altered the social mediations within Czechoslovak television. The chapter is designed to pinpoint the discontinuities with the period prior to 1989. However, it will also have to deal with the continuities as these are crucial for understanding post-socialist television in the sense of its post-socialist institutional organisation and production. Besides introducing new ethos, new organisation, new genres, and new domestic and imported programs, the coming to terms with the institutional past was integral to the post-socialist television development. The refashioning of Czechoslovak television thus followed an ambiguous trajectory which combined holding on to much of the popular fiction production of the past decades while denouncing the downright propaganda production as well as the direct party control over the television programming and organisational infrastructure.⁴²

For the above reasons, I envision the dynamics of social mediation of post-socialist Czechoslovak television to play out along three lines. Firstly, the positive affirmation takes place

⁴² Paulina Bren's study of the Czechoslovak television under state socialism provides great insight in this respect: Bren, *The Greengrocer*.

with regard to what various players in the field (television professionals as well as standard public opinion channels) considered a positive cultural legacy of the socialist television (and film). Secondly, the process of coming to terms with the deplorable aspects of the past takes place on the level of the institutional reforms (lustration, dismissals, new legislation and so forth) and it is also reflected in the programming by substantial changes to news programmes and by the proliferation of TV debates. Thirdly, there are various attempts to rework the television institutionally, aesthetically, and in terms of programme structure in order for it to not only adapt but also to critically respond to the new post-socialist configurations.

These three lines of social mediation which poured into post-socialist programme assemblage will shape my analytic treatment of Czechoslovak (and later Czech) post-socialist television pursued in the thesis. This is not to say that my focus will cover the post-socialist television culture in its entirety. I will instead pay attention to one specific segment of the post-socialist television production which I theoretically constitute as the genre of postmodern satire. Postmodern satire on post-socialist Czechoslovak television was by no means an entirely indigenous species in terms of genre. Furthermore, the need to consider Czechoslovak production of this sort together with what Alexei Yurchak termed the late socialist ‘stiob’⁴³ as well as with the circulation of parody and satire in global media cultures of that period, is absolutely well founded. Yet, I believe that the local aspects of the genealogy of the genre are all the more important for understanding its particular variation. To emphasise the focus on the local contingencies means acknowledging the fact that these programmes were produced for, and intended to operate within, a particular community of TV set owners (and cinema goers) on the

⁴³ Alexei Yurchak and Dominic Boyer, “Postsocialist Studies, Cultures of Parody and American Stiob,” *Anthropology News* 11 (2008): 9–10.

territory of the Czech Republic.⁴⁴ While accounting for the transnational context to a certain extent, this thesis devotes a lot of space to the local context of artistic practice because it asserts that the producers themselves in their work had “an imagined audience” in their mind—an audience which was in position to intellectually and affectively resonate with the nationally, historically, and culturally contingent frame of reference.

Thus, although recognising that television cannot be duly understood without looking into its discursive and technological characteristics which operate transnationally, I argue that in the case of Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic), television also needs to be assessed as a key factor in reproduction of the sense of national belonging. Domestic production was the dominant form of programming for decades⁴⁵ and still remains uncontested in the age of media globalisation.⁴⁶ Moreover, Czechoslovak television was able to integrate even the imported

⁴⁴ A telling example is the answer of Čestmír Kopecký, one of the most significant post-socialist CT programme and film producers, to a question raised on the internet forum of the *Respekt* weekly journal in 2009. Vít Novotný asked if there were any films made in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period which were in the Hungarian or German languages. Kopecký responded that he doubts it and that there was only one exception: The protectorate years (1939-1945). He added: “I do not want to advocate for cosmopolitanism. I believe that our feelings, language, sense of humour, and problems are not so much transferable. So far, I did not try to produce films which would speak to the broader audience beyond our home.” “S Čestmírem Kopeckým o mapování filmové historie,” *Respekt*, January 20, 2009, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.respekt.cz/rozhovory/s-cestmirem-kopecnym-o-mapovani-filmove-historie>.

⁴⁵ The most watched programmes were the Czechoslovak television serials. See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010): 130—176.

⁴⁶ The statistics are available in the Czech Television Annual Reports. For the statistics related to the post-socialist period, see Jiří Pittermann, Jitka Saturoková, and Vít Šnábl, eds., *(Prvních) 10 let České televize* (Prague: Česká televize, 2002).

programmes into the pantheon of the Czech cultural universe.⁴⁷ The most telling example is the practice of voiceover acting in foreign films. The voice actors were often famous actors and actresses, who through their voices co-acted the roles of the foreign film protagonists. As a result, Luis de Funès, the French star of numerous internationally renowned comedies, is impossible to separate from his voice actor František Filipovský among Czech television audiences.⁴⁸

The post-socialist TV production representing what I define as postmodern satire will be therefore contextualised with the prevalent focus on the local specific circumstances of social and cultural mediation. To do this, I will be bridging contexts which are standardly treated separately, and elaborate on the entangled relationship between television and the film industry in the 1990s as well as on the personal overlaps of the Prague amateur theatre milieu with the film and television production in the same period. I will investigate institutional changes which took place in the post-socialist film and television industries and ask in what way these changes opened up the space for alternative creative practice. In other words, I will attempt to understand

⁴⁷ The semiotician and literary scholar Vladimír Macura suggested analysing Czech national culture as a system of myths, most of which were fabricated during the period of “national revival.” He later extended his study by including the contribution of socialist realism to the myth-making practices in Czechoslovakia: Vladimír Macura, “Problems and paradoxes of national revival,” in *Bohemia in History*, ed. Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 182–197, Vladimír Macura, *Šťastný věk: Symboly, emblémy a mýty 1948–89* (Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1992).

⁴⁸ This confluence of Luis de Funès and František Filipovský is all the more striking given that Filipovský died before he managed to dub all the films with Luis de Funès. The remaining films were dubbed by other famous Czech actors, one of them being Jiří Krampol. Interestingly, Krampol stated that he was very nervous about the project because he had to comply with the fact that, for the Czech audience, Luis de Funès *was* František Filipovský and the other way round. Therefore, his effort was not to dub Luis de Funès but to dub the conglomerate Luis de Funès-František Filipovský. See “František Filipovský? Zjistil jsem, proč byl tak geniální, říká Krampol,” *Český rozhlas*, accessed March 5, 2019, <https://region.rozhlas.cz/frantisek-filipovsky-zjistil-jsem-proc-byl-tak-genialni-rika-jiri-krampol-7411055>.

the wave of post-socialist television experimentation by looking into changes in the structure of television as an institution. One of these changes, for instance, was the outsourcing of some programme formats to independent production collectives, which worked under practically no supervision and then merely delivered the finalised versions to be broadcast. The goal of this is to shed light on the conditions of emergence of postmodern satirical aesthetics in the realm of post-socialist public television culture.

I am not the first scholar to propose this analytical framework for the study of Czech audiovisual culture. In fact, I am guided by the scholarly work of Petr Szczepanik, who in a highly elaborate manner researched the state-socialist mode of film production⁴⁹ as well as the post-socialist production culture of Czech screen industries.⁵⁰ It was Szczepanik who started an interdisciplinary debate aiming to connect “schools and waves to communities of practice, or genres to central planning of production in former socialist countries.”⁵¹ Drawing on archival as well as on ethnographic research, one of Szczepanik’s main observations is the interconnectedness between cultural products and social arrangements around their production. He highlights the modes of production and professional relationships to explain the characteristics of the cinematic outcomes. He shows how, during Czechoslovak state socialism, film production was managed on the basis of so-called “units,” which he describes as “semi-autonomous groups of writers, directors, production managers, and sometimes other

⁴⁹ Petr Szczepanik, “The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture,” in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, ed. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113–134.

⁵⁰ Petr Szczepanik, “Post-socialist Producer: The Production Culture of a Small-Nation Media Industry,” *Critical Studies in Television*, Vol 13, no. 2 (2018): 207–226.

⁵¹ Petr Szczepanik, “Lights! Kamera! Azione! Practices, Sites and Careers in European Film Production,” *Illuminace* 22, no. 4 (2010): 182.

personnel.”⁵² Szczepanik explains the specific qualities of the socialist Czechoslovak cinema by looking at the professional biographies of the members of these units as well as what Neringa Klumbytė would describe as “political intimacy,”⁵³ that is the negotiations between creative units, censors, and Party authorities. Rather than asking how the ideological control shaped films or screenplays, Szczepanik maps the influence that the politicisation of the film industry exerted on practices and conventions within the filmmaking units during the filmmaking process. For him, it is essential to look at the professional field of filmmaking,⁵⁴ rather than merely analyse the films, because the field of filmmaking was a crucial intermediary—indeed, an agent—which responded to and “refracted” the political interventions to be able both to accommodate to the external pressures and to maintain (or regain) its relative professional autonomy.⁵⁵ At the same time, Szczepanik is far from considering the field of filmmaking as a purist professional discipline and uses the example of dramaturges to show that the field was communicating with other disciplines such as theatre, music, TV, or journalism. Unlike in Poland or in Hungary,

⁵² Petr Szczepanik, “The State-Socialist Mode of Production,” 117.

⁵³ Klumbytė uses this concept to characterise the kind of negotiation, which took place around making, censoring, and issuing Lithuanian satirical journal *The Broom*. By the concept of political intimacy, she aims to challenge the totalitarian dichotomy between the oppressive power and oppositional resistance as well as Yurchak’s paradoxical argument that “people disbelieved in the official ideology and at the same time misrecognised that they disbelieve in it.” Elaborating on the Lithuanian context, she revises the relations of power which operated under state socialism and points to the active negotiation and to the beliefs and resistance which “in certain contexts and situations [...] did not challenge loyalty and togetherness of the parties involved.” See Neringa Klumbytė, “Political Intimacy: Power, Laughter, and Coexistence in Late Soviet Lithuania,” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 25, no. 4 (2011): 674.

⁵⁴ Szczepanik draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 220–221.

⁵⁵ Petr Szczepanik, “How Many Steps to the Shooting Script? A Political History of Screenwriting,” *Illuminace* Vol 25(3) (2013): 75.

Czechoslovak dramaturges often came from outside of the profession⁵⁶ and therefore were active as intermediaries not only “in the processes of top-down ideological control and in the bottom-up subversive tactics that were developed in the units,”⁵⁷ but also as cultural mediators between the film industry and other art disciplines.

To sum up, the focus on production culture reveals the dynamics of ideological, organisational, and professional mediations which enter into the filmmaking process; they not only shape the cinematic outcome but also are indicative of the more general setting such as ideological supervision or funding structure.

I decided to work with this perspective when analysing the post-socialist Czech Television (CT) production culture since I believe that by analysing the production environment and the way it was reconfigured and operating in the changing conditions of organisation, funding, and politics, I am able to elucidate the context and situatedness of the early post-socialist public TV aesthetics and ethics. While being inspired by the approaches mentioned here, it needs to be said that my research is methodologically framed as a historical study and my analysis is grounded in archival sources, even though I sometimes include the retrospective accounts of the television and film professionals.

1.2. Sources

My past-oriented focus prevents me from following Born’s ethnographical method; my aim, however, is to utilise her innovative perspective and apply her concepts to what constitutes the

⁵⁶ Petr Szczepanik, “The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture,” in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, ed. Petr Szczepanik, Patrick Vonderau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 124.

⁵⁷ Petr Szczepanik, “The State-Socialist Mode of Production,” 130.

body of my research field—the archival material. Similarly to Szczepanik’s approach and his research about the state-socialist mode of film production, my undertaking has to do with the post-socialist circumstantial flux around the institutions of Czechoslovak television and the Czechoslovak film industry. In the following chapter, I discuss the structural changes which impacted both TV and the film industry after the breakdown of Czechoslovak state socialism. These changes were sparked by the expert and lawmakers’ debates which addressed the problem of the state-socialist organisational and personal legacy in the cultural and media sphere and aimed to come to terms with it. In the chapter, I will therefore analyse the debates taking place among media experts, lawmakers, cultural authorities, and other stakeholders. Importantly, I will analyse the CT yearbooks to elaborate on the criteria through which CT assessed its successes and failures as well as the self-made public image that CT, represented by its management, built around itself. In this very sense, I will also frequently refer to the CT documentary series *Rozmarná léta českého filmu* (Capricious Years of Czech Cinema) made in 2010, in which major television and film personalities comment on the first post-socialist decade of Czech audiovisual culture. The CT weekly journal *Týdeník televize*, the expert journals focusing on audiovisual culture, and the Act on Czech Television passed by the parliament in 1991 will further complement the source base of this chapter.

In chapter 3, which delineates the trajectory of satirical performances on CT, I will work, too, with the above-mentioned journals but here they will serve as a map through which I will be able to access the programme schemes and to bring together the contemporary expert debates. Yet, the particular production context stands at the core of the chapter and therefore it is designed to shed light on the genesis of what I define as postmodern satirical programming on CT. I will

discuss the circumstances under which amateur theatre groups, maverick performers, and fresh film school graduates were given a chance and the means to experiment and reinvent the TV genres, especially the entertainment culture compromised by the two decades of “normalised” laughter. I will base my narrative on the published or broadcast interviews with the producers, directors, and protagonists and will aim to delineate their professional paths. In addition, I will also analyse one film (*Don Gio*) and one TV programme (*Studio Kroměříž*) to show the multifaceted and interdisciplinary engagement of its authors and protagonists. The final section of chapter 3 will introduce Fero Fenič, a major post-socialist producer and networker, who was one of the first in Czechoslovakia to start a private production company, *FEBIO*. Among many other projects, *FEBIO*, closely cooperating with CT, produced *Czech Soda*, the subject of the chapter 4.

In chapter 4, I will focus on the *Czech Soda* series which ran on CT between 1993 and 1997.⁵⁸ I will touch upon the formal characteristics of the episodes and discuss what were the dominant schemes in which the postmodern satire operated. I will also thematise some of the overarching topics of the show with the aim of relating them to the tropes and sentiments which were generally characteristic for the post-socialist media and political discourse in post-socialist Czech Republic. *Czech Soda* comprises of 16 original and 9 subsequent episodes but in my analysis, I will mostly choose particular sets of sketches defined by the “original genre” that is

⁵⁸ There was a growing conflict between Fero Fenič, Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV), and the main *Czech Soda* protagonists which eventually led Fenič to abandon the project in 1997. After 1997, *Czech Soda* was no longer produced by *FEBIO* and its authors and protagonists cooperated directly with the CT producers. The new episodes ran on CT under the title *Čtvrtníček, Šteindler and Vávra* since Fenič patented *Czech Soda* as his brand. For more information, see “Tvorba ČESKÁ SODA,” Febio, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://www.febio.cz/tvorba.php?tid=7>; “Mistr černého humoru Petr Čtvrtníček slaví padesátiny,” Týden, accessed April 26, 2019, https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/kultura/divadlo/mistr-cerneho-humoru-petr-ctvrtnicek-slavi-petapadesatiny_518606.html.

being re-signified by their satirical performance. To make it clear, I will structure the analysis along the dominant genre templates that the authors of *Czech Soda* mime, deconstruct, and parody: daily news, TV debates, commercials, and language courses.

I designed chapter 4 as a kind of culmination and finalisation of my thesis narrative. The reason behind dedicating this chapter to the programme *Czech Soda* is that I consider *Czech Soda* to drive the post-socialist public media discourse to its (perhaps unintended) climax. It provided an antithesis to the trustworthy, real-like, ingenuously popular, and common-sense TV genres by using these genres' conventions to produce surreal pastiches out of television journalism, cheeky and absurd claims out of political speech, as well as advertisement of commercially incorrect products. In this regard some might argue that *Czech Soda* represented a challenge to the Czech public TV establishment in its early years. However, I believe that the regular broadcast of *Czech Soda* stimulated a positive dialectic ultimately leading to the continuous self- and public-wide reflection of media discourse in the tumultuous media landscape of a democratising country. No wonder that *Czech Soda* was in the TV schedule section of the CT weekly annotated as “the nationwide test of democracy.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Annotation of *Czech Soda* in the daily TV Programme Schedule. In: *Týdeník Televize* no. 27 (1993), 26.



Figure 2. The third episode of *Czech Soda* premiered on CT1 at 9.40 pm, July 3, 1993. It was annotated as “a third nationwide test of democracy.” In *Týdeník Televize* no. 27 (1993), 26.

2. Running of Unconsolidated TV

2.1. The Garage Revolt

On Wednesday, November 22, 1989, Czechoslovak television broadcast the afternoon youth programme *Kontakt* with four live streams from the Wenceslas square demonstration in which students and workers explained to the reporter their motivations to protest. Although the protests had already taken place for a couple of days, this was the first time in which the protesters got to speak for themselves on TV. In the days which preceded, *Československá televize/Československá televízia* (CST) informed about the protests in a manner which Milan Šmíd characterised as an “unexceptionable description of events.”⁶⁰ It meant that television informed viewers about the demonstrations but the coverage of the exceptionable events aimed to incorporate these events into the “normalisation” meta-narrative, which was perhaps best epitomised by historians Michal Pullmann and Pavel Kolář as the “peace for getting things done” (“klid na práci”).⁶¹ In this meta-narrative, the demonstration of tens of thousands of people on Monday, 20 November, was reported as an orderly, peaceful event which was organised to protest against the misconduct of police rather than associating it with a political, oppositional dimension.

The live streaming on Wednesday made a breakthrough in that it replaced the secure grounds of meta-narrative with the emotional spontaneous voices of people on the streets. There

⁶⁰ Milan Šmíd’s study about the role of Czech media in the process of 1989 political changes is accessible online: Milan Šmíd “Česká media a jejich role v procesu politické změny roku 1989,” *Louč*, accessed April 28, 2019, <http://www.louc.cz/pril01/listopad.pdf>, 26.

⁶¹ Pavel Kolář and Michal Pullmann, *Co byla normalizace? Studie o pozdním socialismu* (Prague: NLN&ÚSTR, 2016).

were cracks appearing on the top-down controlled surface of media reality and the live broadcast was their first manifestation. Not only was the external social dynamics of street protests inflicting these cracks to the “normalised” meta-narrative of television news. While the sites of the country’s wide protest manifestation were the big squares, it was the garages in case of CST where the transformation of the institution was initiated. On Monday, 20 November, protest groups were formed on the level of creative and editorial units and one day later, the transmission technicians, organised as a part of CST trade unions, formulated a protest resolution on the premises of CST garages. After the resolution was dismissed by the CST director Libor Bartla, the trade unionists managed to assemble hundreds of CST employees in the CST garages on the very same day and the occupation of garages continued on Wednesday with the aim to push CST into “more objective reporting” on the Prague events. Among other things, they demanded live streams from the Wenceslas square under the threat of entering strike and, eventually, they succeeded.⁶²

As the street protests took over more and more squares, the conflict within the CST intensified. The revolting staff gained access to the CST newsroom and this meant that not only the grassroots voices got their space but even the meta-narrative shifted. By mediating the voices and the narratives of the protesters, CST gradually ceased to reproduce the discursive legitimization of the consolidated Party state.⁶³ A few days later, CST presented on the screen the main opposition leaders, including Valtr Komárek and Václav Havel. According to Milan Šmíd, the coverage of the protests in big cities as well as officialising of the opposition played a major

⁶² Šmíd, “Česká média,” 28.

⁶³ Šmíd, “Česká média,” 31–33.

role in spreading the message that the change was on the way. The loss of Party monopoly regarding the mass media signalled to people that they could go out and make public claims since an unrestricted public sphere showed signs of being in the making. Moreover, CST, by its mass media definition, had the capacity to convey this message to those who otherwise would be too far from city squares to find out in person.

The strike committee came up with a list of demands which the management of CST addressed in a way which seemed too moderate. Therefore, the occupation of the garages lasted until January 1990.⁶⁴ To settle the CST situation, the federal government appointed Jindřich Fairaizl as a new CST director. Fairaizl was a phenomenal documentary filmmaker whose works from the 1960s were major socio-critical interventions on CST. Given his active involvement during the Prague Spring, the choice to appoint him as CST's first post-socialist director needs to be accounted for in the context of what were considered the positive and negative legacies of CST's past and how these legacies were to position CST in the feverish early post-socialist years.

In his inaugural speech, Fairaizl emphasised that CST employees, especially the politically exposed ones, should themselves come to terms with their involvement in the "normalisation" ideological apparatus. He anticipated that personal exchange and institutional self-reflection should be carried out through settling employees' accounts with the injustices and grievances of the past. To transform CST into a democratic institution, Fairaizl believed, the revision was needed of what it had turned into after the suppression of the Prague Spring. Fairaizl referred to the institutional realities, which followed soon after the invasion of 1968: there were personal screenings, manipulation, mass dismissals, and persecution of both CST

⁶⁴ Jarmila Cysařová, "Padesát let televize. Dlouhá cesta k nezávislosti," *Listy 3* (2003), accessed April 28, 2019, <http://www.listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=033&clanek=030304>.

management and rank-and-file employees, many of whom became manual labourers or emigrated.

There were at least two paradoxes inherent to Fairaizl's speech. Firstly, he foresaw that, in order to come to terms with the "normalisation" past, CST should practically reversely go through the same process which it underwent after the 1968 invasion. Indeed, the wave of screenings, which were called "lustrace"⁶⁵ and took place in judiciary, executive and other important state institutions, did not avoid CST. Besides "lustrace" which specified the good core of the institution in terms of morals, there was yet another "screening" taking place throughout 1990s which in fact brought about a much more significant staff reduction. Only between 1993 and 1995, the number of employees became reduced from 4039 to 3564.⁶⁶ This latter "screening" was underwent as a "slimming diet" whose goal was to render CT sustainable and efficient by dismissing redundant or less competent labour. CT management resorted to the dismissals to address both the bad economic situation and the discourse which was thriving among a number of MPs in the parliament that only "thin" institutions could be fit and prosper. The processual terms of coming to terms with the past as well as of accommodating to the new system thus bore reminiscences with the historical period, which was seen as the most problematic of all.

⁶⁵ To learn more about "lustrace" which Gil Eyal describes as a ritual of sacrifice, I recommend reading Eyal's analysis: "The legislation was probably the most vengeful among Central European countries, in terms of barring former Communists from public office. Nonetheless, its major function was ideological, rather than legal, as was indicated by the term adopted to designate this process. Significantly, it was called *lustrace*, adopted from the Latin, which Šiklová renders as 'purification by sacrifice, purging.' Thus, *lustrace* referred at one and the same time to the purification of society by the sacrifice of its communist 'scapegoat,' and to the purification of the individual by penance and confession." Gil Eyal, "Anti-Politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 56.

⁶⁶ Regarding "lustrace," 457 employees were screened, of whom "only" 21 got positive lustration. All 21 left CT. Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 134.

The second paradox of Fairaizl's speech was the fact that he himself later got a positive illustration: it turned out that he was an active informant of the secret services between 1976 and 1984. These two paradoxes as well as the resistance his plans were confronted with⁶⁷ probably caused his mental breakdown and resignation after less than two months in function.

2.2. Public Service Act(ion!)

Jiří Kantůrek became CST director after Fairaizl and it was during his leadership (1990-1992) that the television undertook major structural changes. First of all, in 1991 CST became institutionally federalised into Slovak and Czech Television before it got split two years later. The Czech Television (CT) was brought into existence by the Act on Czech Television⁶⁸ passed by the Czech parliament in November, 1991. It was this Act which for the first time officially specified that what used to be a state television should hereafter serve the public. What was meant by serving the public was stated in article 2 of the Act:

(1) Czech Television shall provide a service to the public by creating and distributing television channels or other multimedia content and accessory services on the whole territory of the Czech Republic (hereinafter referred to as "public service remit in the field of television broadcasting").

(2) The main public service tasks in the field of television broadcasting include in particular:

- a) providing objective, verified and diverse information, balanced as a whole, to enable free formation of opinion;
- b) fostering general legal awareness among the population of the Czech Republic;

⁶⁷ There were two anonymous notifications about bombs inside CST building in the months following Fairaizl's speech. Cysařová, "Padesát let televize."

⁶⁸ Act on Czech Television, č. 483/1991 Coll. The Act is accessible online and in English version: "Act on Czech Television," Česká televize, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/english/act-on-czech-television/>.

- c) creating and distributing television channels and providing a balanced offer of programmes that is targeted at all groups of the population and takes into account their freedom of religious faith and conviction as well as culture, ethnic or national origin, national identity, social background, age and sex, to ensure that the aforementioned channels and programmes reflect diversity of opinion as well as of political, religious, philosophical and artistic trends, and thus enhance mutual understanding and tolerance and foster the cohesion of a pluralistic society;
- d) developing the cultural identity of people living in the Czech Republic, including the members of national or ethnic minorities;
- e) producing and broadcasting programmes, especially news, current affairs, documentaries, art programmes, drama, sports, entertainment and educational programmes as well as programmes for children and youth.⁶⁹

In what follows, I will try to make sense of that part of my research which was guided by my intention to find out how the public service mission, specified in the article 2 of the Act, was pursued in the first couple of years of CT in operation. Rather than focusing on the programme schemes, I use a more general approach in which I take into consideration several facets of how the public service mission was conceptualised and how it played out. I will outline the major challenges which CT had to deal with in its early years and which led to both internal institutional and public debate about the sense and irreplaceable roles the public service media should perform. Striving for coherence, I decided to categorise the challenges into three points and for every point I designed a separate chapter section.

2.2.1. From State Dependency to Public Service

During the democratising process launched in November 1989, the media was a major topic in the political and expert discussions about what reforms needed to be carried out and what laws

⁶⁹ Act on Czech Television, 483/1991 Coll., §2.

needed to be passed to support the democratic tendencies in the transforming society. Milan Šmíd argues that there was a relative consensus about three aspects of the media reform in the Federal Assembly which later became reflected by the early post-socialist legislation. Firstly, the radio and television broadcast were to be demonopolised so that private radio and television channels could legally operate. Secondly, the organisation of the broadcast was to be federalised into Czech and Slovak institutional entities. Thirdly, the state ownership and control over both Czechoslovak Radio and Czechoslovak Television was to be organisationally transformed to ensure the independence of both institutions.⁷⁰

Unlike in the case of traditional media whose histories reached beyond the history of the state-socialist rule, there was no way for Czechoslovak television to reconstitute its non-communist origins since it was established in 1953.⁷¹ Therefore, the search for the new organisational pattern had to transcend both the national borders and the borders of the Eastern Bloc. In the years which followed the collapse of the Eastern bloc experts and policy-makers put forward initiatives to think about mass media transnationally, as well as to update and advocate for the concepts of public service media mission in the changing political landscape of Europe. In a way, the drive towards cooperation was also reflected in the merging of OIRT (Organisation Internationale De La Radio Et Television) into EBU (European Broadcasting Union).

⁷⁰ Milan Šmíd, “Desetiletí České televize,” in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) *10 let České televize*, 9.

⁷¹ Czechoslovak Television officially started broadcasting on May 1, 1953. See CST history online: “Prehistorie: Československá televize do roku 1992,” Česká televize, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/vse-o-ct/historie/ceskoslovenska-televize/prehistorie/>. The record of the launching minutes can be accessed on youtube: “Československá televize zahajuje vysílání (1953),” video, 5:12, March 11, 2013, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKLjz0SKJPE>.

Bob Collins, by that time the director of EBU television committee, visited Prague in 1990-1991 to deal with OIRT, which had its headquarters there. The negotiations resulted in the dissolution of OIRT and incorporation of all European public broadcasters into EBU. As Collins noted, Czech media representatives actively engaged in this process and continued to be active in the Union which later became manifested by the appointment of Ivo Mathé, the director of CT between 1992 and 1998, as a vice-president of EBU in 1995.⁷² Prague also hosted the second colloquy on East-West Audiovisual Co-operation held by the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament in October 1990. The outcome of the colloquy was the 1147 Recommendation titled *Parliamentary responsibility for the democratic reform of broadcasting*.⁷³ It was stated in the recommendation that the challenge of new technologies in the West as well as the legal vacuum in the East call for the coordinated political and expert response. With regard to the latter challenge the colloquy pointed out the need for the legislative implementation of public service broadcasting model: “The basic problem facing the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe is the search for an audiovisual system to replace the former centralised, politically controlled, media. However, the alternative should not be unbridled privatisation and complete liberalisation, as they could lead to ruinous competition for exclusivity rights or even monopoly. To prevent this, the legal void left by the collapse of the totalitarian systems must urgently be filled with the notions of public service broadcasting (as distinct from public ownership), pluralism, independence and balance.”⁷⁴

⁷² Bob Collins, “Česká televize pohledem EBU,” in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 153–154.

⁷³ Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, Assembly debate on 22 April 1991 (1st Sitting), Recommendation 1147 (1991), Article 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Article 5.

It was made clear in the recommendation that the colloquy was meant as “an expert assistance provided by the Council of Europe at the intergovernmental level to the drafting of new legislation by Central and East European states.”⁷⁵ Besides expert knowledge, its other aim was to stimulate the networking between East and West, “as new systems cannot be invented at a stroke and new ways of thinking need time to develop.”⁷⁶

Indeed, given the engagement and networking talent of the CT director Ivo Mathé, CT’s institutional profile was developed in close cooperation with EBU and Public Broadcasting International (PBI). CT was quite exposed to international debates in this regard even before Mathé became a vice-president of EBU because the 1994 *Resolution on the Future of Public Service Broadcasting*⁷⁷ was passed in Prague during the fourth European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, again under the auspices of Council of Europe. Cooperation, solidarity, and sharing of knowledge were indeed important and often emphasised at the time of Ivo Mathé’s leadership. Indeed, the Western European expertise was to a significant extent implemented in the Act on Czech Television as well as in other related laws. Yet, I would argue that just as the future of public service in Central Europe, and concretely in the Czech Republic was about cooperation and international standards, it was also path dependent on the country’s historical trajectory. The changed legal terms and the public service mission might be seen as “inventing a new system;” yet, this new system was in constant confrontation with the legacy of

⁷⁵ Ibid., Article 8.

⁷⁶ Ibid., Article 9.

⁷⁷The resolution can be accessed online: “The Media in a Democratic Society: Resolutions and Political Declaration,” Council of Europe, accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/leg_ref_coe_mcm_resolution_psb_07_081294_tcm6-4274.pdf.

the CT's institutional past and it would be wrong to overlook the repositories of persons, programmes, and knowledge which continued to form its institutional and programme identity.

What the language of the Recommendation described as the “legal void left by the collapse of totalitarian systems” should not overshadow the fact that some aspects of CT outlived this collapse and that “totalitarian” television, too, had its historicity, dynamics, and ambiguities. Thus, while state CST became “veřejnoprávní” CT (a public service broadcaster) through the parliamentary implementation of the new legislation, it did not mean that the new law filled the void. Rather, the new law was thrown into the existing circumstances and CT's historical legacy.

Despite the proclamations about East and West cooperation and a commonly built future, both the Recommendation and the Resolution draw considerably more on the Western discourses about the role and organisational structure of media. While the representative of CST and later CT participated in the negotiations and later often related to these documents, it is clear that the “path dependency” and insights based on the “other” than Western liberal democratic experience were ignored in drafting of these documents. If “Eastern Europe” plays a role in the documents, then as an imagined, post-totalitarian Other, whom the West now welcomes as a new “family member.” Clearly, neither the previous experience nor the current situation of this new “family member” seemed to matter much; the common future was, certainly, more important. And this future was to be rooted in the discursive universe of the “older” family members. This is reminiscent of Boris Buden's famous essay *Children of Postcommunism*,⁷⁸ in which the inclusion of Eastern Europe into the Western European family was a process charged with hierarchies, where whole countries were conceived of as children, diligently learning to adopt all the kinds of

⁷⁸ Boris Buden, “Children of Postcommunism,” *Radical Philosophy* 159 (Jan/Feb 2010), accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/children-of-postcommunism>.

Western standards, looking up to Western adults as to the source of knowledge given that children are too young to build on experience of their own. Using a psychoanalytical approach, Buden argues that the tendency of imagining the post-communist societies as political children offered “itself as the almost perfect subject of a democratic restart. Untroubled by the past and geared totally to the future, it is full of energy and imagination, compliant and teachable.”⁷⁹

The dominant approach to the state-socialist media systems was driven by the paradigm of transitology. Neither the past, nor the present configuration seemed to matter as much as the anticipated future in which mass media would become part of the democratic practice by mediating between different positions and interests, informing, and cultivating the public. Whereas some printed media related to the democratic, underground, or exile tradition of Czech journalism, other newspapers like *Mladá fronta Dnes* (*Young Front Today*) separated from the past in every major aspect including graphic styles. Regarding CST, there definitely was something in its past which strongly corresponded with the post-1989 democratisation. That something was the role of both radio and television in the Prague Spring and during the August invasion. Yet, the attitude towards Prague Spring legacy remained considerably restrained throughout the 1990s and this chapter of CST history did not leave its marks on drafting of the post-socialist legislation. Jiří Pelikán who back in the 1960s promoted reformist orientation as a CST director and later in exile both published exile newspaper *Listy* and financed the underground newspaper *Lidové Noviny*, met with half-hearted welcome upon his arrival to post-socialist Czechoslovakia. This probably had to do with the fact that Pelikán never retracted from

⁷⁹ Boris Buden, “Children of Postcommunism.”

his communist political stance⁸⁰ and his persona therefore reminded to others that the Prague Spring democratisation had to do with the project of reform Communism. It turned out that the ambiguity of Prague Spring could only hardly be reconciled with the radiant discourse of post-communist transition towards capitalist democracy. For the transition to run smoothly, it proved easier not to look back in this particular aspect.

It is useful to think about Buden's critique of "transitology" in the context of implementation of legislation about mass media in Czechoslovakia and later Czech Republic. At the same time, while the legislation as well as CT's internal binding instructions (especially the CT Codexes which from 1995⁸¹ and 2003⁸² respectively) drew on the public broadcasting frameworks established on the European level, the ways CT management, programme directors, and creative units interpreted and conducted the notions of public service was contingent on more factors. The concept of public service with its function and mission was something CT learnt mainly from British and German "adult" public broadcasters. Yet, the new operational paradigm entered into historically and culturally situated field and the first years of CT as a public broadcaster need to be seen as a time, in which there indeed was an interaction between the treatment of CT's historical legacy, CT's current situation, the newly implemented regulatory framework, and the projected visions.

⁸⁰ See the interview with Antonín Liehm: "Hledání v paměti: Velký rozhovor s A. J. Liehmem," in: *Divadelní Noviny* (June, 2015). It is possible to access the interview online, accessed May 9, 2019, <https://www.divadelni-noviny.cz/hledani-v-pameti-velky-rozhovor-s-a-j-liehmem>.

⁸¹ Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) *10 let České televize*, 108—109.

⁸² The Czech version of the latter CT Codex can be accessed online: "Kodex České televize: zásady naplňování veřejné služby v oblasti televizního vysílání," Česká televize, accessed May 1, 2019, https://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/kodex-ct/pdf/kodex-ct.pdf?_ga=2.173711137.321914179.1556742850-1518730992.1555964902.

An important benchmark in evaluating the performance of these interactions was how progressive they were. The managerial sector of CT, politicians and part of the public used the criterion of progressiveness when commenting on CT's performance. Mostly, CT was seen as insufficiently progressive and burdened by the legacy of the state-socialist past. On the other hand, the progressiveness, as reflected in the political and public debates, was sometimes far from being conceptualised in relation to the ethos of public service. Rather than being measured against this template, CT was measured against the emerging private TV channels and its failures were seen as being the result of CT's non-commercial status. Thus, CT was mostly critiqued for being less inventive, less audio-visually attractive, and merely (and slowly) reacting to the agenda which was being set by private broadcasters, especially by TV Nova.⁸³

Measuring CT's progress with the notions of private entrepreneurship, market competition, and culture shaped by forces of demand does not account for all cases but still stands for an important "common sense" of a particular segment of the 1990s Czech political and public discourse.⁸⁴ Yet, even if the neoliberal orientation, especially after the electoral victory of Civic Democratic Party, might be seen as dominant thinking of the 1990s, I would oppose the notion of hegemony in this respect. The era of privatisation and commodification of culture was in fact one filled with a continuous intellectual critique. Even if the most coherent critical voices stemmed from the generation of "osmašedesátníci," that is from the political and intellectual

⁸³ Jaroslav Veis, "Boj o pozornost: Deset let zpravodajství České televize," in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., *(Prvních) 10 let České televize*, 25.

⁸⁴ Václav Klaus was the most important, and most energetic representative of this post-socialist neoliberal mindset. Klaus was the founding father of the Civic Democratic Party, which seceded from Civic Forum and won the 1992 elections. Klaus held the function of Minister of Finance between 1989 and 1992. Following the 1992 elections and the victory of the Civic Democratic Party, Klaus became the prime minister and held the post until 1998. He played a major role in the talks which led to the "Velvet Divorce," the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.

cohorts of Prague Spring in 1968, there were various other critical discussions or reflections as well as alternative practices taking place in media, art and everyday life, respectively. While the TV programmes to be analysed in the subsequent chapters to some extent represent a part of this challenge, here I will point out the discussions concerning CT in general which conceptualised it as a necessary complement to the market-driven media system. Media of public service alongside the national cinematography stood indeed at the core of the discussions bringing in the issue of democratic, cultural, and other sorts of needs which cannot be saturated by the market alone.

One such discussion took place in 1991 during the *Golden Prague* International Television Festival. It was organised by FITES, Czech film and TV unions and its title was *Retaining television culture*.⁸⁵ The very title indicates that, despite the “legal void,” there was a legacy not only worth of remembering but also maintaining. At least this seems to be the idea posed by FITES. Among the participants were journalists and filmmakers, out of which probably the most well-known were Pavel Tigrid⁸⁶ and Jaromil Jireš.⁸⁷ It was Tigrid and the leader of FITES, Vlastimil Venclík who presented the most antipode views. According to Venclík, “the

⁸⁵ The discussion is in part documented in the journal *Film a doba*: “Kultura svobody (Diskuze v rámci MFF Zlatá Praha),” *Film a doba* 4 (1991): 221–223.

⁸⁶ Pavel Tigrid was one of the most famous Czech publishers in exile. He left Czechoslovakia first in 1939 for political reasons as well as because of his Jewish origin. During the Second World War, he worked for the BBC. He emigrated once again in 1948 and lived in the West Germany where, among other things, he worked for Radio Free Europe. He later lived in the USA and in Paris. He was invited back to Czechoslovakia after 1989 to work as an advisor to Václav Havel. Between 1994 and 1996, he held the post of Minister of Culture.

⁸⁷ Jaromil Jireš is a director of the Czechoslovak New Wave. His 1968 film adaptation of Kundera’s *The Joke* is perhaps his most renowned film. He was productive also during the period of late socialism as well as in the 1990s. Many of his films were originally made for television.

diktat of money can prove to be even worse than the diktat of ideology.”⁸⁸ He therefore was suspicious of the process of Westernisation since this might merely flood the screen with commercials and sensationalism. Tigrid, on the other hand, considered Venclík’s concerns to be gross moralisations: “It seems that the people of Czechoslovakia are afraid of money. They are suspicious of the rich people. Minister Klaus rightly pointed this out as nonsense. An investor comes, a millionaire, and everyone is afraid that he’s about to steal from us... And the issue is the same regarding television.” Tigrid then continued that television should not strive to cultivate the viewers: “I witnessed many attempts which aimed to cultivate mankind. Stalin, Hitler, McCarthy... If I were to choose between the diktat of dollars and the diktat of ideology, I would immediately go for the diktat of dollars. Because nobody is forced to be dictated by the dollar if one does not want to, whereas there is no escape if one is subjected to the diktat of ideology.”⁸⁹

Jarmila Cysařová, a television critic, then turned attention to the paradox that both television and cinema performed well under the “diktat of ideology”: “I remember the fifties and sixties. We were hermetically sealed here and yet, we got rewarded with so many prizes at the international festivals. It was our inventiveness, not influences from elsewhere, that made us succeed in world cinema.”⁹⁰ In response, Venclík referred to the opening of the hermetic seal as to the beginning of turning culture into business: “As the leader of FITES, I am in touch with colleagues of our branch from abroad. Sometimes, it seems to me that the exchange is not about ideas, inspiring or helping each other, but about profitable business. They want to work with us

⁸⁸ “Kultura svobody,” 222.

⁸⁹ “Kultura svobody,” 222.

⁹⁰ “Kultura svobody,” 223.

because for them it's cheap here. [...] We need to make things differently in order for us to be competitive. The question is, however, where to get financial support to realise this..."⁹¹

Two bones of contention are presented here: Firstly, the discussants were divided on the issue whether independent culture can emerge under "the diktat of dollar" or whether it needs non-commercial funding. Secondly, there were differing opinions regarding the opening up of the television culture to the foreign influences and Western investors. Whereas the first division particularly resonated in the upcoming conflict around the privatisation of the Barrandov Studios, the second issue played an important role in the process of CT's self-articulation as a post-socialist public service broadcaster. From the very beginning, the discussions about changing the CT's status from a state to a public service broadcaster accounted for the aspect of demonopolisation. Thus, not only were the status and mission of broadcast to be changed by the new legislation, but the new system accounted for the dual broadcast, i.e. the coexistence of public-funded and commercial media. The parliamentary session from November 1991 shows that the precise line between these two was not so easy to draw. It was clear that the era of state television had passed; however, it was far from being refined what is meant by the longed-for plurality. The MP Martin Bursík, for example, considered the option of CT being financed mainly by means of advertising as the most viable. He was sceptical about license fees and, most of all, wanted to avoid state funding, which to him necessarily brings about political influence: "At this stage, when the democratic institutions of our country are not yet institutionalised, I believe that linking the independent service of public broadcast to the government or parliament represents a more imminent danger than commercial influence of, let's say, washing powder

⁹¹ "Kultura svobody," 223.

companies exerted over CT. I don't want to be ironical here, yet I believe that the political influence is at this point way more dangerous than the commercial one.”⁹²

Another MP, Oldřich Kužilek, characterised CT as a colossal “moloch” which only can go forward if competition is introduced to this field. In his view, private broadcasting, by its nature, could push CT to keep pace with it by becoming more innovative and less bureaucratised: “The transformation of state television is a complicated process since this half technologic and half bureaucratic colossus, shaped by personal influences and habitual practices, rarely moves forward. It is because whatever is produced is deemed right since people watch TV regardless of what runs there. The only way how to change it is to introduce competition.”⁹³

These views denoted that, in order to function, the public service broadcast vitally needed either to incorporate some aspects of the commercial operational model or to become dialectically confronted with the commercial channels in order to move forward. Approximately a month later, the Czech parliament elected a new CT director, Ivo Mathé whose take on this issue was in line with dualism being the new common sense. Yet, his argument was somewhat different. Reflecting on the development of CT in 1992, he stated: “This was the last year before the start of commercial TV which will complete the dual television system in the Czech Republic and liberate CT from the unwanted monopoly. The natural role division between public and commercial television will make it possible for CT to fully embrace its mission - public service.”⁹⁴

⁹² Martin Bursík cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*První*) *10 let České televize*, 36.

⁹³ Oldřich Kužilek cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*První*) *10 let České televize*, 37.

⁹⁴ “Ročenka České televize 1992,” cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*První*) *10 let České televize*, 42.

Mathé hoped that the implementation of dualism would clearly distinguish the commercial from the non-commercial broadcast model and thus provide distinct contours within which CT would operate as a non-commercial medium. He was looking forward to the launching of the commercial channels since they would be conducive to CT's self-identification. Moreover, Mathé believed that the mission of a public broadcaster only makes sense in the environment of coexisting alternatives.

These debates are part of the context which would otherwise remain hidden if I only were to focus on the legislative amendments, which conceptually drew to a large extent on the Western public service legislation and especially on the 1147 Recommendation of Council of Europe. Before and after the legislation was passed, there were quite a variety of opinions regarding the present condition and the future role of television. Moreover, the deliberation about television's mission took place simultaneously with federalisation and subsequent dissolution of the federation into two separate states. The new regulation was taking root at the time of various transformations and it was not only the combination of denationalisation, demonopolisation, and democratisation, which made it difficult for the "imported" law to address the situated condition of post-socialist country in the split; rather than in the vacuum, the new regulation was to operate within the context of existing post-socialism, that is, within what Jan Lukeš characterised as "psychological climate of established viewers' habits mixed with the sensationalism of the new."⁹⁵ Besides the expert debates represented by the 1147 Recommendation as well as by the 1994 Resolution, there were various other public platforms which I believe were relevant stimulators of thought and imagination about the legacy and future of the Czechoslovak and

⁹⁵ Jan Lukeš, "Program České televize z ptáčích perspektiv," in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 15.

Czech Television respectively. These might not have been reflected in the wording of the legislation but nonetheless played a role in the subsequent years, in which CT management had to face unfavourable economic situation, makeshift political solutions, and two major crises: the misconduct and aggressive strategy of the private channel TV Nova and the politicisation of the *Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting* (RRTV). The search for a direction continued as the new challenges emerged and I would argue that the debates which grew out of local specific contingencies were more important for how the people at CT, the wider public and political elites thought of it than CT's legal status. This is not to say that the legal regulation lacked binding force. What mattered, however, was how these regulations were interpreted, complied with or ignored, critiqued or utilised as a critique. The public service paradigm became a template for thinking in terms alternative to the interests of state representatives, as well as to the logic of market competition. It posed an alternative, authorised by the fact that it originated in Western democracies and that it therefore was considered part of Czech "return to Europe." Thus, despite being contested by some politicians and disliked or ignored by some segment of public, it became an arena of continuous attempts, failures, and findings about the in-between position, which is subordinated neither to the political nor to the profit-making goals.

What were practical proceedings of providing that this mission is not impeded from being accomplished is the focus of the upcoming section.

2.2.2. Making of the Dual Media System

The process of federalisation started in March 1991 with the law which federalised the media system between Czech and Slovak Federative Republics. In July 1991, the Slovak Parliament

passed a law which established Slovak Television. In October of the same year, the Federal Assembly passed a law about the dual television and radio broadcast which enabled the coexistence of the public (“veřejnoprávní”) and private broadcast operators. One week later, the Czech parliament passed the Act on Czech Television. Czech Television officially started to operate on the first of January 1992 with Ivo Mathé as an interim director. At the same time, Czechoslovak television maintained operation on the channel F1. Thus, there were Czechoslovak, Slovak, and Czech Television network operating in 1992. CST broadcast on channel 1 and the respective national network broadcast on what used to be channel 2 of CST. One more channel, which until May 1990 was transmitting Soviet programs, now turned into OK3.⁹⁶ OK3 stood for *Otevřený kanál* (Open channel) and transmitted the satellite broadcast of US, French and German TV channels. The end of the Czechoslovak state meant the end of CST. The three broadcasting channels on the territory of Czech Republic turned into CT1 (formerly CTV), CT2 (formerly F1), and CT3 (formerly OK3).⁹⁷

Besides its managerial board led by the CT director Ivo Mathé, there was a monitoring organ RRTV, appointed by Czech parliament. Its task was to monitor and evaluate the compliance of both public service TV and radio with the internal statutory arrangements as well as with the public service and broadcasting laws.⁹⁸ The Council was conceived of as a group of independent intellectuals representing various disciplines. The first Council consisted of eleven more or less known members, among them lawyers, journalists, an astrophysicist, a political

⁹⁶ Petr Bednařík, Jan Jiráček and Barbara Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti* (Prague: Grada, 2011): 377–378.

⁹⁷ Bednařík, Jiráček and Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií*, 377–378.

⁹⁸ Act on Czech Television č.483/1991 Coll.; Act on Radio and TV Broadcast č.36/1993 Coll.

scientist, a writer, a composer, and an art historian. The Council met every two weeks to discuss the public TV and radio performance and to address problems and complaints raised either by the public or by the Council members.

The major focus of the RRTV in the early years of its existence was on the process of developing the dual media system through granting the licenses to private broadcasters. Given the limited spectral density of frequencies, it was anticipated that granting of licenses to private broadcasters would mean reducing the number of channels at the disposal of CT. Indeed, the first countrywide private broadcaster, TV Nova, was set on what used to be federal frequency F1 while CT was left with two channels CT1 (former CTV) and CT2 (former OK3).

In its yearly report on the activities undertaken in 1993, RRTV summed up that letting in the private broadcasters was deemed the overall priority: “The main focus of RRTV in 1993 was on granting licenses in order to ensure the plurality of mass media, freedom of speech, free flow of information and to meet the diverse tastes of viewers and listeners.”⁹⁹ Clearly, the scrutiny of CT’s accomplishments as a public service broadcaster was limited mainly to the aspect of demonopolisation, that is to ensuring the diversity of institutional entities. Less attention was paid to how people within CT interpreted and followed legal obligations in terms of plurality of CT programme scheme. In fact, the discussion which reflected CT as a guarantor of diversity within its own programme scheme followed only in 1995 during the parliamentary sessions about what to do with CT2, which was meant to be part of CT only temporarily, concretely until the end of 1995.¹⁰⁰ CT management wanted to keep the CT2 channel and it argued that two

⁹⁹ RRTV, “Zpráva o stavu vysílání o činnosti Rady České republiky pro rozhlasové a televizní vysílání” (Prague: Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 95.

channels were helping to create alternative cultures within the public service medium in that they are designed to serve the nuanced needs of different publics. The discussion about whether the channel should be kept as CT2 or whether it should be released for a potential private broadcaster went on for months, not only in the parliament but also in media. There was a survey organised by CT in which “people of culture” responded to the question: “What do you think about CT2?” The responses were published in CT weekly *Týdeník televize* (Television Weekly) and—perhaps not surprisingly in this kind of source—most of the respondents advocated for keeping both the profile and the public service status of CT2. Some of the respondents approached the topic more generally and reflected on the development of CT as well as on its cultural and social role. I believe these reflections deserve particular attention because they are, in a way, an unprecedented articulation of the various intellectual positions within the Czech public sphere with regard to the public service media.

In most cases, the respondents characterised the quality of CT2 as being diverse and serving the interests of the minorities. By minorities, they meant ethnic and cultural groups and I believe that there was a strong link to the system of independent production as well, which supposedly became sidelined by the commercial logic targeting the interests of majority. This was expressed especially through their worries regarding the state of documentary production and by criticising what they considered to be Czech tendency of anti-elitism.¹⁰¹ One of the respondents, the writer Eva Kantůrková set the notion of exclusivity against that of mediocrity and argued that considering “special, minority, and cultural needs”¹⁰² is the primary task of the

¹⁰¹ Response of Jiří Vejvoda, cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 98.

¹⁰² Response of Eva Kantůrková, cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 97.

public TV. By exclusive and cultural needs Kantůrková meant those needs which could not be addressed if it is merely the majority interest which ultimately shapes the demand. Kantůrková considered CT2 as the platform where the alternatives to the cultural mediocracy could exist and she saw the existence of alternative as a value per se which does not need to be affirmed by viewership rates. Clearly, she considered this alternative as being culturally superior but the main quality of it was that it introduced formats and programs which served not only the minority interests but also the society as whole by showing the diversity and critical potential of cultural production. This was something which the commercial channels could not perform because, in Kantůrková's view, the mass taste always brings about the cultural conformity.¹⁰³ Other respondents argued that CT2, by focusing on the programmes which meet the interest of the various minorities, meets the needs not only of minorities but also of the whole society by fostering cultural solidarity between minority and majority interests. CT2, by targeting the diverse tendencies and cultural needs, was thus imagined as an inclusive public sphere in which the multiplicity of voices beats the dominant or loudest one. Indeed, releasing the channel for the private broadcaster was seen as giving up part of the public.¹⁰⁴

Kantůrková's criticism of anti-elitist tendencies popped up several times in the survey which I believe shows the sentiments of Czech intellectuals, for whom the post-socialist commercialisation felt like a hang-over and who, imagining themselves as elites, were shocked to realise that, instead of being at the vanguard of defining the cultural tastes, they became one of many minorities. Their defence of CT2 therefore must be also read as a defence of their position

¹⁰³ Response of Eva Kantůrková, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Response of Alexandr Kliment, cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., *(Prvních) 10 let České televize*, 96.

and of the important platform on which the cultivation they hoped for might get enough space. Jiří Just, a theatre theoretician who later in 2000 ran his own programme *Katovna* on CT2, argued for keeping the CT2 by contemptuously distancing CT2 production from the distaste of what he coined “bingos.”

I dare to say that films by Buñuel or Allen, Czech documentaries, and even the Czech programmes in general are more valuable and tasteful than the series full of fervour and adventure, *Nováci*,¹⁰⁵ and *Bingo*.¹⁰⁶ It is natural that there is a rule of distaste during the dictatorship of the proletariat. But how come that the distaste is now being considered proof of pluralism and freedom? I decided to coin the term “bingo” to describe a healthy person in productive age who consumes a daily dose of episodes, entertaining competitions, murders, and acoustic intercourse. Why should these “bingos” be even more pampered? Why should we give more space to their entertainment? Don’t they already have enough? Sometimes I get the impression that the market rules serve the market purists so that they can run away from responsibility—so that they can say ‘That’s not me. It’s the supply and demand.’¹⁰⁷

In his commentary, Just draws a distinction between Czech programmes and the programmes such as *Nováci* and *Bingo*. Although both were produced in Prague and starred the Czech protagonists, Just did not consider them Czech programmes. A possible explanation of Just’s demarcation might have to do with the notion of genre. Neither *Nováci* nor *Bingo* fit into Czech TV culture based on their genre. While the genre of *Nováci* stood for “situační

¹⁰⁵ Original series produced and running on TV Nova in 1995—1996.

¹⁰⁶ TV show which combined lottery with entertainment. It ran between 1994—1996 on TV Nova. The scandal made an abrupt end to *Bingo*. It turned out that the programmer of the lottery hacked the system and recruited laymen to take part in the show to win the main prizes. The prosecuted programmer left for the United States and was apprehended only in 2017. See “Lovci lebek po 20 letech dopadli muže, který obelstil televizní Bingo. Pro výhru posílal komparzisty,” Aktuálně, November 11, 2017, accessed May 15, 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/policie-po-dvaceti-letech-zadrzela-podvodnika-z-televizniho/r~36d2ce2ec31611e79c7c002590604f2e/?redirected=1510125766>.

¹⁰⁷ Response of Jiří Just, cited in Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl eds., (*Prvních*) *10 let České televize*, 99.

komedie” (sitcom), *Bingo* was a sensationalist show, which stood far from the sober tone of *Mates* lottery running on CST/CT between 1967—1994.¹⁰⁸ By not considering them Czech programmes, Just sought to challenge their authenticity but, as the viewership rates suggest, his dismissal of the shows was not followed en masse. Nearly 3 million of people watched *Bingo* back then.¹⁰⁹

Just’s contemptuous response also shows that the endeavour to maintain CT2 took place in a discursive setting which considerably diverged from the vague consensus about the public and private broadcast dualism discussed couple of paragraphs above. The introduction of the dual media system gave rise to the antagonism between the commercially driven and public broadcasting. At the same time, the real existing commercial broadcasting and the growing number of “bingos” led some intellectuals to assess the potential and the cultural role of non-commercial TV, namely CT2.

¹⁰⁸ *Mates* is a shortcut for “*Malé televizní sázení*” (Small TV Betting). See the excerpt from 1972: “Losování Matesa,” Youtube, 4:52, June 6, 2012, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI0tuXapcwg>. The gambling under state socialism is a phenomenon which still needs to be properly researched. I was surprised to learn that twelve gambling machines in the *Luxor Cafe* in Prague were installed during state socialism. See the minute 24 of the CT episode *Retro*: “Retro: Hazard,” Česká televize, 26:08, premiered October 18, 2009, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10176269182-retro/209411000360031/titulky>. In 1994, *Mates* became subjected to parody in the 12th episode of Czech Soda, see “Česká soda (1994) Losování matesa,” Youtube, 1:06, June 7, 2010, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fi-tOB4J3N0&t=6s>. *Mates* means a salted herring in Czech. Hence the fish in the drawing drum. TV Betting continues on public television until this day under different name *Losování šťastných 10* (Happy 10 Draw).

¹⁰⁹ I got this information from the online newspaper *Aktuálně*, not from the official viewership statistic. I assume that the information is correct, yet there could have been fluctuation throughout the period in which *Bingo* ran. “Lovci lebek po 20 letech dopadli muže, který obelstil televizní Bingo. Pro výhru posílal komparzisty,” *Aktuálně*, November 11, 2017, accessed 20 May, 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/policie-po-dvaceti-letech-zadrzela-podvodnika-z-televizniho/r~36d2ce2ec31611e79c7c002590604f2e/>.

The position of CT's leadership, too, shifted dramatically after the first country-wide private TV Nova began broadcasting in February, 1994. TV Nova soon beat CT in terms of viewership rates: in 1995, 71.2% of those with their TV set turned on watched TV Nova.¹¹⁰ The immense popularity of TV Nova can be ascribed to the fact that the programme scheme consisted largely of programs produced in the US or Western Europe. Unlike in late socialist Poland or Hungary, there were very few American programs on CST before 1989. This meant that there was a huge popular demand for programmes and films of Western provenience after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. In 1992, CST broadcasted the famous American series *Dallas* on the federal channel F1 and it was the most popular programme of that year.¹¹¹ The CST managers believed that by screening *Dallas* on F1 the broadcaster was playing the role of still non-existing private broadcasters.¹¹² Thus, the continuation of the subsequent series of *Dallas* on TV Nova after 1994 can be read as CT finally giving up the burden of commercial broadcasting to the entity which was seen as better constituted for that. However, the move of *Dallas* from CT to TV Nova as well as the proliferation of other American series and films, entailed a vast loss of viewers who, too, switched to TV Nova. At the same time, many employees left CT for TV Nova¹¹³ since it promised a better salary and, in particular cases, celebrity status.

¹¹⁰ Pavel Krumpár, "Počátky duálního televizního vysílání v České republice," in: *Illuminace* 21, no. 2 (2009): 27.

¹¹¹ "Seriál Dallas slaví 40 let. V roce 1992 byl v Československu nejsledovanějším televizním pořadem," iRozhlas, accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.irozhlas.cz/kultura/televize/dallas-vyroci-serialu-40-let-dabing_1804021015_rez.

¹¹² Ivo Mathé, "První rok České televize," in Pitterman, Saturoková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 42; Jiří Pittermann, "Formování programové koncepce," in Pitterman, Saturoková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 48.

¹¹³ Pavel Krumpár, "Počátky duálního televizního vysílání v České republice," *Illuminace* 21, no. 2 (2009): 23.

The director of TV Nova Vladimír Železný took part in the open competition for the position of CT director in 1992 and the fact that he did not win led to a personal rivalry with the appointed CT director Ivo Mathé. Železný pursued an aggressive strategy once he became the director of TV Nova¹¹⁴—for example by setting the time-slots and programme schemes in the way which lured away the viewers from the established viewing patterns in that TV Nova put Hollywood production to run simultaneously with the flagship programs of CT. What was seen as unfair by the management of CT was at the time considered fairly legitimate by Železný: “We are both competing for the same money pie in the small, devastated market. CT entered the market as a subsidised, sovereign institution and suddenly it is surprised that it has compete with energetic, aggressive, and tough rival. CT underestimated us.”¹¹⁵ Železný asserted that TV Nova was disadvantaged because it depended on profit making while CT’s subsidies were not directly related to its performance. Using the unfair means in the competition for the viewers was justified in Železný’s view because he saw the system of dual broadcasting as favouring CT.

Subsidies, which consisted of the license fees paid by each household, were the predominant source of funding for CT. The revenues from television advertisements were meagre since the commercials on CT were limited to 1% of the overall broadcast time, this limit being one of the lowest in Europe.¹¹⁶ While Železný deemed these subsidies unjust, they certainly were not enough to make CT economically stable throughout the 1990s. In response, there were austerity measures undertaken in CT, such as the already mentioned staff reductions.

¹¹⁴ I draw on the interview with Železný from 1994. Simona Matásková, “Ředitelský duel,” *Týdeník Televize* no. 26 (1994): 10—11.

¹¹⁵ The citation is from the same interview: Simona Matásková, “Ředitelský duel,” *Týdeník Televize* no. 26 (1994): 10—11.

¹¹⁶ Pavel Krumpár, “Počátky duálního televizního vysílání v České republice,” in: *Iluminace* 21, no. 2 (2009): 51.

CT also tapped its financial reserves and sold some of its real estates. The license fee remained unchanged for several years and did not reflect the rising inflation rate even though CT management and RRTV lobbied in the Parliament for increasing of the license fee. In May, 1997, Parliament passed an increase of the fee from 50 crowns to 75¹¹⁷ crowns which significantly contributed to CT's financial consolidation.

Keeping in mind this context, it is now more obvious that the position of CT was far from secure in the years 1994-1995 and that keeping the channel CT2 as a public service channel was not at all a matter of course. The survey undertaken by the editors of *Týdeník Televize* showed important public intellectuals advocating for the non-commercial status of TV which was under siege of commercial influx. The fact that CT2 might soon become a thing of the past made them think of its present irreplaceable role. CT2 was taken for granted and treated without much affection, until it suddenly was—just as the possibility arose that it might no more exist.

Both 1994 and 1995 were years of insecurity caused by the emergence of TV Nova and by the austerity measures. Yet, it does not suffice to put blame merely on TV Nova or on stagnating license fees. Another problem was that the responses to these challenges by CT's leadership were often vague and defensive. The vagueness and failure to formulate CT's agenda independently of private broadcasters continued well into the late 1990s with some exceptions. One of the exceptions indeed was the struggle to maintain CT2 which stimulated debates among intellectuals, in the parliament, and within the CT itself about what were the indispensable qualities of having two public service channels. Eventually, these debates not only resulted in Parliament's decision to keep CT2 in operation, but also brought about articulation of both of

¹¹⁷ Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) *10 let České televize*, 157.

CT's channels role and identity. Jan Lukeš, one of the major film critics back then, summed it concisely in his 2002 essay, which assessed the ten years of CT's existence:

Czech Television program, which operates on two channels, is not only alternative to the world of private media, but also creates alternative notions of public service within the public service television itself. The different programme schemes of each channel mean targeting different groups of viewers and, in this sense, they both reflect on and shape the interests, streams, expectations and objectives of society. The programme of CT is part of the society but it also serves the society. It mirrors and anticipates the tendencies which take place in national and supranational context. Therefore, it must be diverse and tolerant because only if we account for alternatives, pluralism, and empathy, we humans can coexist in dialogue.¹¹⁸

It was not only through its program, however, that CT provided a space for alternative in what became a largely commercialised field. In this respect, CT's decision to support Czech cinematographic production was perhaps of even greater importance.

2.2.3. Shattered Cinema Sheltered

To understand what happened to Czech cinema after 1989, I again need to begin with the early post-socialist years. Back then, the cinemas were nearly empty. The films made in 1990 and 1991 were ignored because their scripts already belonged to another era. According to Jan Jíra, a film producer, in those times “people travelled to Germany to indulge in consumerism or to

¹¹⁸ Jan Lukeš, “Program České televize z ptáčích perspektiv,” in: Pitterman, Saturková and Šnábl, eds., (*Prvních*) 10 let České televize, 20.

Austria to buy carpets with floral patterns.”¹¹⁹ If the omnipresent enthusiasm made people go to the cinema, they would go see *Rambo* rather than a Czech movie.¹²⁰ While some people were eager to compensate for what until recently had been a forbidden fruit of consumerist and Western popular culture, other people projected and pursued different dreams and goals. One of them was Věra Chytilová who, besides her famous films from the 1960s, was one of the few Czechoslovak directors who managed to make critical films in the restrained conditions of the 1970s and 1980s.¹²¹ For Chytilová, the new era was meant to be about artistic independence and freedom of expression. Yet, she believed that independence only could be achieved if there was functional institutional infrastructure and if those in film profession were organised. Both her engagement in the restored film and TV trade unions FITES and her outspoken fight against the privatisation of Barrandov Studios account for this.¹²²

However, her position was in the minority. The younger generation of directors considered her position anachronistic in that it argued for the strong role of the state in the field

¹¹⁹ There is a collection of interviews of film and TV professionals about the 1990s and 2000s which was put together, edited and broadcast in 2011 under the title *Rozmarná léta českého filmu* (Capricious Years of Czech Cinema). There is overall 20 episodes, each episode covering one year between 1990 and 2009. Here I refer to the first episode, see Jan Jíra in “Rozmarná léta českého filmu 1989/1990,” Česká televize, 52:52, premiered January 4, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10267861763-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu/21056226501-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu-1989-1990>.

¹²⁰ Jan Jíra in “Rozmarná léta českého filmu 1989/1990.”

¹²¹ See the study which compares her pre-1989 and post-1989 career: Jindřiška Bláhová, “‘Before I fought ideology, not money’: Věra Chytilová and the 1990s transformation of Czech cinema culture,” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2019): 39—54.

¹²² See the sequence 3:40—4:15 with Věra Chytilová confronting Tomáš Ježek, one of the ministers in charge of the privatisation projects: “Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992,” Česká televize, 52:05, premiered January 18, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10267861763-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu/21056226503-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu-1992/video/141925>.

of audiovisual production. Igor Chaun, a prolific director in the 1990s, recalled that his heart beat for the directors of Czechoslovak New Wave, such as Chytilová and Menzel. Yet, the spirit of post-socialist transformation and his youthfulness made him side with the changes. Retrospectively, he considered it a good position since “their apocalyptic calls about the end of Czech film were false prophecies.”¹²³ While for Chaun the new opportunities outweighed the new restraints, Chytilová did not see sense in these opportunities exactly because of these restraints. After more than two decades of confronting the diktat of ideology, she now confronted the diktat of dollars: “We believed that the change is finally coming and that we would finally become free. We did not know that we would fall into capitalist times in which the capitalists would be the ones to determine what they want and what the viewers want.”¹²⁴ Besides her engagement in FITES, she continued with filmmaking. The brilliant irony of her 1992 film *Dědictví aneb kurvahošigutntág* (The Inheritance or Fuckoffguysgoodday) was that her critique of post-socialist capitalism was a commercially successful project.¹²⁵

By the time *The Inheritance* was in the cinema, Barrandov Studios lost more than two thirds of its employees. Despite the opposition of Chytilová, Jiří Krejčík and other filmmakers,

¹²³ Igor Chaun in “Rozmarná léta českého filmu 1990/1991,” Česká televize, 54:04, premiered January 11, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10267861763-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu/21056226502-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu-1990-1991>.

¹²⁴ Věra Chytilová in “Rozmarná léta českého filmu 1989/1990,” Česká televize 52:52, January 4, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10267861763-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu/21056226501-rozmarna-leta-ceskeho-filmu-1989-1990/>.

¹²⁵ Bláhová, ““Before I fought ideology””: 39—54.

the government decided to sell off Barrandov Studios in the first round of privatisation.¹²⁶ Moreover, after the disbanding of the *Ústřední ředitelství Československého filmu* (Central Directorate of Czechoslovak film), the state stopped supporting film production financially. Václav Klaus, by that time prime minister, rationalised the withdrawal of the state by arguing that good culture could sustain itself.¹²⁷ For Petr Zelenka, who started his career as a director in the 1990s, the privatisation of Barrandov and the end of state support epitomised wild capitalism and neoliberal sense-making respectively. He would have preferred to see Barrandov as a state company which would produce state-funded films.¹²⁸ Čestmír Kopecký, by that time CT producer, retrospectively commented on the withdrawal of state by equating it with a crime.¹²⁹ Both Zelenka's and Kopecký's retrospective views operate with what happened to Barrandov after it was privatised. After producing four Czech films which did not pay off, the management of Barrandov led by the director Václav Marhoul gave up producing films for the small Czech market. Henceforth, Barrandov offered operational services to foreign film producers¹³⁰ and TV Nova made use of the renown of once famous film factory on the Barrandov hills by renting a part of the complex for its broadcasting.

¹²⁶ For more context and the contemporary debates, see the 2012 documentary *Neviditelná ruka trhu: Privatizace Barrandova* (The Invisible Hand of the Market: The Privatisation of Barrandov) made by Martin Kohout. Zuzana Piussi's 2009 documentary about the privatisation of Koliba Studios in Bratislava complements the context. Her documentary *Koliba* is accessible online. "Koliba," Dafilms, 45:00, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://dafilms.cz/film/8377-koliba>.

¹²⁷ "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992," Česká televize, 52:05, premiered January 18, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10267861763-rozmarna-lea-ceskeho-filmu/21056226503-rozmarna-lea-ceskeho-filmu-1992/video/141925>.

¹²⁸ Petr Zelenka in "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992."

¹²⁹ Čestmír Kopecký in "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992."

¹³⁰ "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992."

While Barrandov Studios became the headquarters of TV Nova, Czech cinema was offered a shelter across the river at the CT premises, and part of the production moved from Barrandov Hills to Kavčí hory (Jackdaws' Mountains), where the CT studios were located. Many of the Barrandov employees, such as the dramaturg Václav Šašek or the director Petr Koliha, started to work for CT. It was not only them who thought that CT could ensure continuity of Czech cinematography by coproducing selected films.¹³¹

Besides the supporting role of CT, *State Fund for Support and Development of Czech Film* was established by law in 1992 and came under the Ministry of Culture. The funding provided by the *State fund* could nevertheless cover only a small part of the production expenses. There were private production companies and private television channels providing support as well but, with the exception of *FEBIO*, the prospect of profitability played a more decisive role in the application process than was the case of CT and *State Fund*.

CT had stepped in already prior to the privatisation of Barrandov since it was clear already in 1991 that there was no budget left because the state withdrew. Judging from how Ivo Mathé or Čestmír Kopecký commented on the decision to become major coproducing actor in the field of Czech cinema, I would argue that the notion of public service was decisive in this respect since it presupposed CT's responsibility in "developing the cultural identity of the citizens of Czech Republic."¹³² Given the prominence of "national cinema" in the pantheon of other branches of Czech cultural identity, I interpret the decision of CT management to "support" post-socialist film production as having to do with the public service mission. Besides, the

¹³¹ CT coproduced more than 200 films since 1992. See "Misto, kde jsou filmy doma," Česká televize, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/filmy/>.

¹³² Act on Czech Television, 483/1991 Coll., §2.

practical reasons might have been similarly important—being a coproducer meant co-owning the copyrights and therefore CT could freely broadcast these coproduced films on its channels. One should also not forget that film and television people worked in both industries which made it difficult to draw clear lines between the two cultures. This can account for the spontaneity of the move between the areas as well as for the continuity of the some of the filmmaking units despite the changing economic conditions.

In 1995, the Czech President Václav Havel invited Czech filmmakers to Lány castle to discuss the economic and organisational aspects of the post-socialist film production after the state gave up the monopoly in this field. Havel found this event a good opportunity to "disembark from his silence"¹³³ and gave a speech in which he reflected on the tendencies of contemporary Czech cinema. He also assessed the decentralised film funding. His use of language situated him far from the position of Věra Chytilová and other FITES members:

There is another advantage of having a decentralised funding: less money is lost to corruption and there is no need for bureaucratic apparatus. The most important thing is, though, that the decentralised funding provides for ultimate pluralism and colourfulness. Every factory is vitally interested in turning the place of its location into a creative and enterprising environment. It can happen that the factory provides funding for rubbish. Yet, among all the rubbish, the plurality ensures that there will emerge one thing totally worth it. Take the case of America. There, the millionaires found ten Kafka museums out of which nine are absolutely trash, but then there is one which is the right one. And you would not have it without having those nine.¹³⁴

In this passage, Havel conceived of filmmaking as of any other enterprise. He seemed to see the reliance of culture on the creative and enterprising market environment as conducive to the

¹³³ Jan Lukeš, "Kde je vše povoleno, nic nepřekvapí: S Václavem Havlem o českém filmu let šedesátých a devadesátých," *Illuminace* 8, no. 1 (1996): 89.

¹³⁴ Jan Lukeš, "Kde je vše povoleno," 90.

cultural pluralism and this implies that he at that time sided with Klaus' assertion that "culture can sustain itself"¹³⁵ when relying on the market forces and on the private sponsorship. While emphasising the cultural plurality, Havel neither specified what qualities one should look for when choosing the one right Kafka museum out of ten, nor accounted for the possibility that his choice might be fairly contingent on his habitus. Unlike Chytilová, he did not refer to the notion of independence, and there were certainly many more things in his speech that would make Chytilová clash with him. However, Chytilová was not among the twenty-nine directors and critics who visited Havel in Lány. We do not know whether she might have asked him if the one right Kafka museum is also the one most visited, or how to make the right Kafka museum matter among all the trashy ones.

One of the directors who visited Lány that day was especially fond of Havel and his ideas. He loved him so much that, after Havel's death in 2011, he even ran a successful campaign for renaming the airport in Prague after him.¹³⁶ The director Fero Fenič will be mentioned quite a few times in the subsequent chapters. At this point, it is important to note that Fenič was among those who deeply cherished the horizons of expectation which were brought about by the "Velvet Revolution." The transformation of society that he witnessed led him to rethink his role in it and he eventually gave up his career as a filmmaker to become creative entrepreneur. I will further

¹³⁵ "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992."

¹³⁶ There is a topographic and historical rationale in renaming the Prague airport after Havel. The renaming is one of the few events driven both by pathos and irony. The airport is located in the Prague district Ruzyně and before becoming *Václav Havel Airport*, its official name was *Prague Ruzyně International Airport*. During "normalisation," Václav Havel spent several years in Ruzyně prison which is located nearby. The renaming of the airport thus aimed to redefine the space by stressing the legacy of Václav Havel, a freedom defender, over the legacy of Ruzyně, semantically strongly linked with the imprisonment of Havel and other dissidents.

situate Fenič and his role in establishing the postmodern satirical genre at the end of the next chapter.

Having delineated the CT trajectory within the changing landscape of Czech media culture, I will now proceed to describe a trajectory within the aforementioned trajectory. In what follows, I will introduce the creative practices and unsettling aesthetics of Prague theatre milieu and how these entered a nationwide public domain by becoming affiliated with CT.

3. Inform, Educate and ~~Entertain~~ Unsettle!

In this chapter, I focus on the programmes created with the help of or by Czech Television, which reflected upon the major societal and discursive shifts that were brought about by the “Velvet Revolution.” To perform this task I will first establish a set of criteria to delimit the process of selecting the programmes for the study.

Firstly, I decided to confine my inquiry to the programmes which both in their form and function correspond with the characteristics of satirical genre as it was outlined in the introduction. I will discuss the programmes which, as they were running on CT, operated unprecedentedly in terms of format and satirical utterances, at least when thinking of television medium in the Czech context.

Secondly, I will only be focusing on the works, which were produced in Prague studios, where most of the CT projects has been realised. By defining the localised perspective, I want to be attentive to the local-specific cultural formation. More concretely, I am interested in the social and cultural background of people who produced and hosted these satirical programmes since they constituted an interconnected network linked to the Prague amateur theatres: *Sklep* (The Basement), *Křeč* (The Spasm), *Vrata* (The Gate), and *Jak se vám jelo* (How was your ride). In addition, many of those involved in the amateur theatre studied around the same time at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (henceforth FAMU) and became promising film directors, making their debuts in the 1980s. FAMU alumni, keeping their ties to the theatre groupings, recruited their friends from theatre to become film actors or even creatively adapted the theatre performances in their early film works. In this way, people who got

together in the amateur theatre scenes in Prague during the period of late socialism established good connections with the young generation of filmmakers, which gradually translated into regular cooperation in film and TV projects.

The investigation of the specific genre which originated from the Prague amateur theatre culture may justify the omission of the programmes which were running on CT in the 1990s and which were standardly classified as satirical cabarets. Namely, *S politiky netančím* (I don't dance with the politicians) and *Na šikmé ploše* (On the slippery slope) started broadcasting in 1995 and appeared six times and four times a year respectively. The former ended on CT and moved to the commercial channel TV Nova in 2000, while the latter's last episode appeared on CT in November 1998. The reason for this omission is that both were traditional cabarets taking place in the theatre, with the host(s) and guest(s) joking about politics, in response to which the audience clapped and laughed. This format drew on the regional interwar traditions of political cabaret,¹³⁷ as well as on the socialist "*estrada*,"¹³⁸ even though the latter was in Czechoslovak

¹³⁷ Aniko Imre shows the continuity between political cabaret and socialist and post-socialist genres of television entertainment in more detail. See Imre, *TV Socialism*, 227—241.

¹³⁸ Estrada relates to the scenic entertainment on stage, often including dance, theatre, and singing. The most corresponding English term would probably be a variety show. Semantically, the term Estrada subsumes various state-socialist festivities which took place in theatre or TV studios and showcased the popular artists. In Czech case, one can think of *Televarieté* with Vladimír Dvořák and Jiřina Bohdalová. Notably, it stayed popular with the audiences after 1989. For example, it was the most viewed programme on CT in the last week of May, 1993. "2x10 nejsledovanějších," *Týdeník televize* 27 (1993): 2. For illustration, there are whole episodes of *Televarieté* on YouTube, see the 1977 edition "*Televarieté* - 28.vydání (1977)," YouTube, 1:14:34, March 27, 2013, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=763cnfUhIyM>.

case strictly apolitical, especially after 1968/9.¹³⁹

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the satirical TV programmes by inquiring into the early post-socialist production culture. Therefore, the content of and response to these shows will be discussed only shortly, whereas the backbone of the narrative will consist in outlining the institutional and informal artistic environments, as well as the motivations of people involved in either producing or performing these programmes.

3.1. Trajectory of the satirical performances on Czech Television

On the 28th of October 1990, which was the day marking the 72nd anniversary of Czechoslovak independence, and almost one year after the November events known as the “Velvet Revolution,” CST decided to fight the shortage of satire in Czechoslovakia, by releasing the French satirical programme *Carabine*.¹⁴⁰ *Carabine* ran on the OK3 channel, which, only a couple of months before, had been a frequency used by the Soviet Television CT SSSR. Since May 1990, the frequency began to be administered by CST and was renamed to OK3 (*Open Channel*). Its broadcasting mainly consisted of programs taken over from foreign satellite stations such as CNN, TV5 and RTL. In CST’s *Týdeník Televize* (Television Weekly) issued for that week,¹⁴¹ it was argued that satirical humour correlates with the advancement of democracy. Thus, so the

¹³⁹ In Poland, for instance, television developed a more critical potential. Probably the most known case represents Olga Lipińska and her TV shows that since 1974 satirically reflected on Polish contemporary realities. In 1984, her TV series *Kurtyna v gore* were banned. Interestingly, the ban was issued only *after* the end of military rule in Poland. The ban of Lipińska’s show yet did not bring the end to the satirical TV production. Stanislaw Bareja’s comedy series *Alternatywy 4* premiered in 1986. Imre, *TV Socialism*, 220, 234—237.

¹⁴⁰ The television cabaret *Carabine* originally ran on French TV5. Author not specified, “OK 3 21:30 Carabine,” Programme Annotation for October 28, 1990, *Týdeník Televize* 43 (1990): 21.

¹⁴¹ Author not specified, “OK 3 21:30 Carabine,”: 21.

assessment went, there was no original-made sharp-edged satirical TV programme yet:

Satire is a precious spice of the social life and even more so on TV. There is lack of good humour on our television, not to mention satire. The countries which are deeply rooted in the democratic tradition do not face any problem regarding satire. How come that Frenchmen and Englishmen are in position to expose themselves and their honourable institutions to ridicule, whereas in our countries, even today, the fragile flower bud of satire would not bloom? Even when sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers provided us with the answer, it would not change the fact that the television viewers lack the opportunities for satirical or ironical ridicule.¹⁴²

Carabine was meant to be a substitution to what was in short supply in the local entertainment culture. However, it is important to mention that even though satire was almost absent on late socialist CST, it did not imply the absence of television entertainment as such. On the contrary: there were quite a few entertaining programs, some of which survived the regime change and continued well beyond 1989 without significant interruption. Besides “normalisation” TV series analysed in-depth by Irena Reifová¹⁴³ and others, the television revue *Televarieté* has been immensely popular with audiences¹⁴⁴ and, despite being directly linked to the “normalised” television culture, CST and subsequently CT broadcast it until 1998. Generally, one can say that *Televarieté* maintained a form of “estrada” cabaret and refrained from commenting on socio-political realities, although there might have been a few exceptions regarding the episodes after

¹⁴² Author not specified, “OK3 21:30 Carabine”: 21.

¹⁴³ Irena Reifová, “A Study in the History of Meaning-Making: Watching Socialist Television Serials in the Former Czechoslovakia,” *European Journal of Communication* 30, no.1, 2015: 79–94; Irena Reifová, “Rerunning and “Rewatching” Socialist TV Drama Serials: Post-Socialist Czech Television Audiences Between Commodification and Reclaiming the Past,” *Critical Studies of Television* 4, no. 2, 2010: 53–71; Irena Reifová, “Sons and Daughters of Jakob, the Glassworker: Dominant and Resistant Meanings in Television Popular Fiction after 1985,” *Mediální Studia* 2, no. 4, 2007: 376–415.

¹⁴⁴ “2x10 nejsledovanějších: Týden od 24.5. do 30.5. 1993,” *Týdeník televize* 27 (1993): 2.

1989. Other entertaining shows were derivatives of *Televarieté* format, including *Možná přijde i kouzelník* (Perhaps Even the Wizard Comes) running from 1984 to 1991 and the hit parade of socialist pop music *Hitšaráda* (Hit-Farce) running from 1978 to 1986 and again between 1990 and 1996 under the altered name *Šaráda* (Farce).

None of those programs yet corresponded with the genre of satire as it was imagined by the editors of CST Weekly. Soon, however, the post-socialist development saw the emergence of its homegrown ironical commentaries. In the following section, the focus will be on the audiovisual projects, which were developed by people of Prague amateur theatres and which CT decided to support, collaborate on, or even initiate. I argue that CT was to a significant extent conducive to programme (and film) production, which was not only subversive in relation to the existing television formats and contents, but which also critically approached meta-narratives surfacing in the post-1989 discussions about Czech past, transitive present, and dreamt-of future. Through the prism of these works, this thesis wants to address this particular aspect of how CT carried out its new role as a public service broadcaster. Creating and screening programs, which provocatively participated in the contemporary critical discourses and parodied elite discussions and media representations of political deliberations, social developments, and economic processes is crucial, yet underestimated aspect of what public broadcasting was about back then.

3.2. Celebration of the Death Anniversary

Probably the first post-revolutionary film CT coproduced was *Don Gio* directed by the Caban brothers. Upon its release, the film was annotated as “an expressive, morally cultural horror-

musical”¹⁴⁵ with its main protagonist Karel Roden alias Don Gio being stuck inside "the arena of spiritual relationships and carnal desires.”¹⁴⁶ The coproduction contract was signed¹⁴⁷ by Ivo Mathé, who by that time was CT chief producer and later, in 1993, became the managing director of CT. The film was shot in the studios of CT at the occasion of the two hundred year anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s death. The narrative method of the film was postmodern and the opening shot was quite emblematic in this regard: it showed the television put into a classicist frame. On the television, there was a talk show hosting the executive producer of the planned *Don Giovanni* theatre play, in which he was also going to play the main role. The debate was driven by the financial concerns of the producer, Don Gio, for whom the project symbolised first of all an investment, the spiritual quest being inextricable from material satisfaction. The main location of the film was the *New Theatre*, which stood for a postmodern mixture of construction site, Mozart candy stands and historicist interior. There was heavy beer drinking, billiards, champagne and destruction in the backstage, while the audience was being showered by the obscenities, which were taking place on the stage. The line between rehearsals and performance stayed blurred throughout the film. At one point, the actors rose up against Don Gio who intended to capitalise on their bodies by channelling the play into erotic spectacle. They were led to the barricades by producer’s ex-wife Elvíra with the red flag, a role symbolically played by a French actress Chantal Poullain. The revolt abruptly ended as the catering arrived and made people into indulgent consumerists. The Commendatore, who sealed the doom of Don Giovanni in the original play, was embodied by the Western investor who presented a business

¹⁴⁵ Author not specified, “Don Gio,” *Filmový přehled*, no.11 (1992): 9-10.

¹⁴⁶ Author not specified, “Don Gio,” *Filmový přehled*, no.11 (1992): 9-10.

¹⁴⁷ “Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992.”

plan to the producer/Don Gio. After they had negotiated a deal, the *New Theatre* was turned into a strip club for the nouveau riche.

Don Gio was the first film made by Caban brothers as directors but it was not the first film in which they took part. Šimon Caban and Michal Caban were primarily choreographers, scenic designers and theatre directors. Their main activity was linked to the avant-garde ballet theatre group *Křeč* (The Spasm), which they founded around the year 1980. Starting as an amateur theatre, *Křeč* gained quite a positive acclaim. In 1983, they performed together with *Sklep* theatre,¹⁴⁸ which was soon to become one of the most prominent amateur theatres in Prague. In the same year, they appeared in Miloš Forman's *Amadeus*, namely in the scene where Mozart conducted the final act of his opera *Don Giovanni*.¹⁴⁹ One year later, *Křeč* staged their own play *TV 20.10 Právě tady!* (TV 20.10 Right Here!) in Braník theatre of pantomime.¹⁵⁰ There, they imitated "normalisation" TV genres, such as weather forecasts, drama serials, advertising, and youth TV club. Satirical effects emerged from their overacting, rhythmic motion, and inserted gags. Preoccupation with visual technology, such as TV and video, can be found in their later performances as well. In 1988, *Křeč* was starring together with four other amateur theatre groups in the film *Pražská 5* (The Prague Five) directed by Tomáš Vorel, who himself was a member of *Sklep* theatre. According to some theatre critics then, performances of *Křeč* represented the most radical postmodern poetics of the Czech contemporary theatre in that

¹⁴⁸ "Baletní jednotka Křeč," Česká divadelní encyklopedie, accessed May 20, 2019, http://encyklopedie.idu.cz/index.php/Baletn%C3%AD_jednotka_Křeč.

¹⁴⁹ "Cabani Amadeus 1983," YouTube, 1:27, January 20, 2012, accessed May 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=74&v=LBgUDkw7TWc.

¹⁵⁰ "Baletní jednotka Křeč," Česká divadelní encyklopedie, accessed May 20, 2019, http://encyklopedie.idu.cz/index.php/Baletn%C3%AD_jednotka_Křeč.

they consciously mixed genres to create a spectacular slack out of disparate styles.¹⁵¹

In the *Film Review* periodical,¹⁵² *Don Gio* was described as “the first real reflection of the state of Czechoslovak society after 1989, void of moralising sentiments.”¹⁵³ From the set of conflicts and themes of *Don Gio*, I will pinpoint merely the one between the idealist theatre director, who wanted to dramatise the triumph of good over evil, and the producer, who rejects the dichotomy of good and evil and for whom *Don Gio* is about “the competition of two and more truths.”

Jan Lukeš, prominent film critic, compared *Don Gio* with the Czechoslovak film *The Party and the Guests* made in 1966 by the New Wave director Jan Němč. ¹⁵⁴ Both *The Party and the Guests* and *Don Gio* were surreal allegories attempting to account for what were the underlying dark aspects of modern and postmodern society, respectively. Moreover, both dealt with the indistinguishability of play and real life, and thus aimed to expose the staged character of social interactions, while also making clear that there was no possibility of an escape. Indeed, there was a tragic notion to the impossibility of avoiding the unbearable lightness of farce in one’s life. Those who strove for the alleviation and retreat to authenticity were in fact re-affirming the circumjacent masquerade. They became the fools in the eyes of the fools. Still, the

¹⁵¹ Pavel Pavlovský, “Satira tancem,” *Tvorba* 15, no. 25 (1984), 10; Jan Vedral, “Od módy k názoru,” *AmatSc* 22, no. 6 (1985), 8.

¹⁵² *Filmový přehled* (Film Review) is the oldest Czech film periodical, published since 1939. It was meant primarily to inform the professionals in audiovisual industry, but it gradually attracted broader audiences. It gives information about the new films in the distribution, including film content, short film review, and details about the filmmakers and actors. In 2013, it stopped being published and since 2016, the internet platform of the same name follows in the footsteps of its printed predecessor. Accessed 20 May, 2019, <http://www.filmovyprehled.cz/en>.

¹⁵³ Author not specified, “Don Gio,” *Filmový přehled*, no. 11 (1992): 9-10.

¹⁵⁴ Jan Lukeš, *Orgie střídmosti, aneb konec československé státní kinematografie* (Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 1993), 233-235.

tragedy of those who saw through but were not in position to change anything about the situation, was not the primary source of unease in neither of the films. Rather, the unease stemmed from the cynical consciousness¹⁵⁵ of those who could see through but acted as if this was not the case, or even co-directed the play by making sense of the seemingly absurd inner logic.

3.3. Mystification Is the Only Sincere Attitude

If *Don Gio* was a postmodern heir to the modernist dystopian cinema of the 1960s, then a similar affinity can be established between the 1992 programme *Studio Kroměříž* and Václav Havel's early 1963 play *The Garden Party*. The criterion through which these works are most aptly comparable is based on the fact that both of these works paid a special attention to language as both constitutive, reproductive or subversive operational tool that was employed to legitimise or delegitimise the existing fabric of social positions and power structures. Whereas in *The Garden Party* it was the technocratic discourse that was exposed as being detached from the lived experience and essentially self-referential, *Studio Kroměříž* was problematising the process of intellectual deliberation practised by established authorities in a public space. Both technocratic discourse and intellectual deliberation were performed as alienating forces that assumed their authority and captured the speech on the grounds of the privileged status they enjoyed in the modern truth regime.

There are at least two more links between Havel's absurd theatre play and *Studio Kroměříž*. Václav Havel and Petr Lébl, the director of *Studio Kroměříž*, were strongly influenced

¹⁵⁵ Yurchak, "The Cynical Reason": 178.

by the versatile experimenter Ivan Vyskočil who together with Jiří Suchý initiated so called *divadla malých forem* (theatres of small forms) in the second half of the 1950s. Together with Suchý and others, Vyskočil founded the *Theatre on the Balustrade* in 1958, where Václav Havel started as a stage hand. In the 1960s, *Theatre on the Balustrade* premiered Havel's *Garden Party* alongside with other absurd dramas (Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu*, Franz Kafka's *Process*).

Petr Lébl, indisputably the most discussed theatre director of the 1990s, became the artistic director of the same theatre in 1993. He never finished the Prague Faculty of Theatre and was a graphic designer by education. Before coming to the *Theatre on the Balustrade*, he won recognition as an amateur theatre director and was performing with the amateur theatre group *Jak se vám jelo* (How was your ride). The first relevant television project in which he took part was the docufiction ...*Theme Franz Kafka* where he starred as Franz Kafka. Alongside Lébl, Ivan Vyskočil appeared in the role of Kafka's demanding father. The intimate and yet complicated relationship between Lébl and Vyskočil was mirrored through these roles, even though in reality, Vyskočil was a great admirer of Lébl, both guiding him and being guided by him, as he later recalled.¹⁵⁶

Studio Kroměříž was produced by CST in 1992 and its ten episodes ran on CST/CT in the years 1992–1993. It was directed by Petr Lébl and strongly influenced by the genre of “the seminar theatre,” term used to describe experimental forms of Ivan Vyskočil and members of Jára Cimrman theatre.¹⁵⁷ Its format strongly referred to the intellectual talk shows on TV, where

¹⁵⁶ See the documentary about Petr Lébl “Příběhy slavných: Andělé tě hlídají,” Česká televize, 57:37, premiered June 15, 2000, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10123383458-pribehy-slavnych/400223100031002-andele-te-hlidaji/>.

¹⁵⁷ Vojtěch Mašek, “Zpětný průlom do Studia Kroměříž,” *Cinepur* 17, no. 64 (2009), 42.

respected authorities gathered to discuss current topics or present their expert opinions on anything which mattered. The programme was set in the studio with neoclassic statues and Biedermeier sofas. Each episode was framed either by the philosophical problem or by the pressing issue of the day. The episodes were titled: *Archetypal Human Substance* (1), *Downfall of the Mankind, Ecology, and the Downfall's Margins* (2), *Inquiry into Human Existence* (3), *Selection Committee Recruits New Face of Studio Kroměříž* (-), *Artistic Freedom* (4), *Czech Honza*¹⁵⁸ *Phenomenon* (5), *A Little Gift After Christmas* (6), *Restitution* (7), *Octopus Found in the National Theatre* (8), *The Vengeance of Mr. Jezerka* (9). Each episode was moderated by Pavel Löbl, the alter-ego of Petr Lébl, who invited people both known and unknown to the television viewers and stirred the intellectual “feasting.” Especially in the first three episodes, the civic intellectual passion of protagonists did not suggest the wholesale mystification; the talk show format was only gradually being undermined by the unsettling character of the talk. By the moment the television viewers began to question the candid character of the setting, the uncertainty permeated the discussion in the show as well:

Hendrychová: It dawned on me just now.. What if our world is only a rehearsal and the real world comes only after this one cease to exist?

Pelikán: You see, my optimism, thank you very much...

Hendrychová: It's in my mind now...

Löbl: This can raise, if you will, a provocative question: it can lead to ethical simplification of our existence because we would relate to this world as if we were merely rehearsing. The real life comes only after we finish the rehearsals, right?

Hendrychová: But we must claim the responsibility, even now...

¹⁵⁸ Czech Honza is a plebeian fairy tale hero.

Löbl: For the rehearsal.¹⁵⁹

The indistinguishable line between life and rehearsal, between reality and its representation, and between viewers' and protagonists' concerns was in my opinion what made this program, distinctly postmodern. Only as it became clear to the viewers that the talk show was a mystification, the postmodern meta-narrativity achieved its prominence. After the seriousness of the programme became ruined in the viewers' eyes, the only ones who remained serious about the programme were the protagonists themselves. They continued to forge their arguments in all the more passionate fashion and grew into their roles in the way that their real selves merged with the feigned ones.

Both the intellectual endeavour of the protagonists and their dwelling in what turned out to be an absurdist trap were gradually being mingled with what normally stayed behind the camera. For instance, the setting changed in the episode *Selection Committee Recruits New Face of Studio Kroměříž* and, instead in the ostentatious studio, the show took place in the casting room, where Lébl and people of Studio Kroměříž searched for prospective partners in the philosophical debates to come. The nonsensical play so far enclosed within the boundaries of the studio thus transcended into the outside world, colonising it with its own logic. People from outside came by each episode and followed, therefore legitimised the rules of the absurd world of *Studio Kroměříž*. In the Christmas episode 6, *Studio Kroměříž* hosted Helena Vondráčková, the celebrated star of Czech pop music, and Michael Jackson (who was however impersonated by someone else). The Christmas atmosphere was spoiled as the rest of the guests responded to Vondráčková's "estrada" songs by behaving like prehistoric species of the Stone Age. In the

¹⁵⁹ The transcription of the third episode of *Studio Kroměříž*, in Vojtěch Mašek, "Zpětný průlom do Studia Kroměříž," 42.

following episode, *Studio Kroměříž* found itself under existential threat because it changed the owner due to the post-socialist reform. The furnishings of the studio was in decay, the statues and columns were turning into ruins, and the protagonists were forced to undertake their philosophical inquiry in the freezing cold since the power supply had been cut. Despite the worsening conditions and émigré Jezerkova family claiming *Studio Kroměříž* their property, the debaters, sitting on the dustbins kept reassuring about their moral victory.

“It was not supposed to be about humour,” said Petr Lébl in reaction to the disconcerted reception of the show.¹⁶⁰ In the programme schedule of *Týdeník televize*, *Studio Kroměříž* was annotated as a programme “answering the fundamental questions and mysteries of human existence in an unanticipated manner.”¹⁶¹ All seems to indicate that Petr Lébl took his mystification seriously and that his decision to parody people’s quest after meaning stemmed from the notion of parody being sincerer than the template which it referred to.

As stated above, Lébl was primarily a theatre director and he came to work on this television project thanks to the creative producer of one of the CST production units Čestmír Kopecký who managed to get a sufficient support for it in CST. Kopecký recalled that in order for *Studio Kroměříž* to be broadcast, he needed to produce *Beneficent Ball* hosted by Karel Gott.¹⁶² Viewership of 3 million of the latter programme provided him with enough negotiating power to push for unconventional programmes with hypothetically much lesser viewership

¹⁶⁰ Vojtěch Mašek, “Zpětný průlom do Studia Kroměříž,” 41.

¹⁶¹ Jiří Macek, “Studio Kroměříž,” in *Týdeník televize* 53/1 (1992—3): 25.

¹⁶² “Karel Gott - You Got It/1. Benefiční ples 1993,” Youtube, 2:50, August 14, 2012, accessed May 19, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_1MyqqdJs4.

rate.¹⁶³

Besides *Studio Kroměříž*, Kopecký also managed to bring in the *Czech Soda* programme and ensured its long-term broadcast on CT. *Czech Soda* was a project initiated and produced by the production company *FEBIO*. Contextualising the origins of *FEBIO* will be the main focus of the following section.

3.4. Fero Fenič Intervenes—the Success Story

In 1993, Fero Fenič, one of the most remarkable filmmakers of the late 1980s, explained why he stopped making films soon after the Velvet Revolution.

After November 1989, I received plenty of offers to make feature films. It is also true that sometimes I get touched by some new films, by their humane qualities. But none of new films strikes me the way Italian films of the 1960s or Ingmar Bergman's films did. It is strange, yet I feel that the cinematography arrived to the point from which it cannot proceed further. It became just perfect, especially from the technical point of view and the technicist aspect dominates the cinematic language now. [...] Everything we watch now in the cinema refers to what already had been made before. To sum up, new films do not make us surprised.¹⁶⁴

Fenič's formulation markedly resonates with the later theorisation of Mark Fisher about the genre of capitalist realism.¹⁶⁵ For Fenič, though, there clearly was a possibility of escape from this standstill without tragic consequences. The key to understanding the alternative path he made for himself is perhaps to look at his social background and give hearing to what his mother

¹⁶³ "Ta láhev šampaňského je dneska poloprázdná, říká Kopecký o energii po revoluci," *ihned.cz*, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-62859310-ta-lahev-sampanskeho-je-dneska-poloprazdna-rika-kopeccky-o-energii-po-revoluci>.

¹⁶⁴ Eva Zaoralová, "FEBIO a Fero Fenič: Z rozjetého vlaku se nedá vystoupit," *Film a doba* 39 no. 2 (1993): 69.

¹⁶⁵ Mark Fisher, *The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2014).

once told him. Fenič was born to a peasant family in Eastern Slovakia and the first film he ever saw was shown to him by the village priest. Since the plots of his family had been nationalised, there was nothing for him left to inherit and farm on. After being intellectually stimulated by the personality of the village priest, he decided to apply to FAMU in Prague. He had difficulties, though, to justify his decision because his mother never visited cinema and never even watched TV. “After they accepted me to FAMU, I went and told it to my mum. She looked at me for a long time and then she started crying. ‘Why to become a director? People need doctors, teachers, and priests. Who needs a director?’ I was so upset after hearing this. ‘I will tell you, mum!’ But then I could not think of anyone. Who really needs a director? And so I decided to become a director who is needed by people.”¹⁶⁶ He therefore developed a professional ethos which went beyond aesthetic qualities and independence of expression. The decisive aspect of his professional commitment was that of social service. This can be noticed in his early documentaries which aimed to represent those without representation¹⁶⁷ but, for the most part, it

¹⁶⁶ I am quoting Fenič giving an account of his career trajectory in the video portrait accessible on youtube. However, I was not able to trace if the video portrait was originally a TV program, festival video or something else. See “FERO FENIČ PORTRÉT,” Youtube, 27:10, November 9, 2017, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNO3FcVsrWc>.

¹⁶⁷ See for example his 1981 documentary *Tam a späť* (There and Back) about the workers from Eastern Slovakia working at the construction site in Prague. There, he juxtaposed the ordinary, everyday life of workers with the heroic music, commenting thus ironically on the working-class heroisation under state socialism. After the music is over, workers speak for themselves (“I am Milan, the hero of this film and here is my roommate.”) or are silent without voice over to speak on their account. They are shown being tired, being cheerful, working, eating, and talking about their experience of life in the big city with their close ones back home. This documentary was banned and the reasons given to Fenič were that “the documentary is a falsification of reality since there are no such unkempt workers in the socialist society.” The quote is from “FERO FENIČ PORTRÉT,” Youtube, 27:10, November 9, 2017, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNO3FcVsrWc>. The whole documentary is accessible, too: see “Fero Fenič: Tam a späť,” Youtube, 20:28, May 23, 2013, accessed on May 28, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jw_YbYYjTUI&t=9s.

is reflected in Fenič's post-socialist switch to becoming a producer.

Fenič was a prolific director during 1980s but most of his documentaries and films were banned. He was fired from Koliba Studios in 1986 based on the reasons of his “anti-socialist activity.”¹⁶⁸ He then moved to Prague and worked as a tourist guide under changed name. Just before the November events, an offer came from Barrandov and Fenič made his last feature film *Zvláštní bytosti* (Strange Beings)¹⁶⁹ whose allegoric message according to Fenič ceased to be relevant after 1989.¹⁷⁰ In 1991, he founded a production company *FEBIO* (*Feničův Biograf*) whose focus was producing the documentaries about current times. His aim was to provide a platform which would support the directors in making documentaries while also keeping them independent in choosing the subject matters and throughout the filmmaking process.¹⁷¹ *FEBIO* was something which was vitally needed in the post-socialist condition but which could not just emerge given the nature of the incoming economic system: “I felt *FEBIO* is needed. I hoped somebody else would initiate this sort of project but nobody did. The new economic system made people think one-way. They were only incentivised by financial prospects. They all started to make commercials and justified themselves by saying that it is actually inspiring activity. Nobody was keen on creating non-commercial space for maintaining and expanding the creative potential and authorship. So I kept complaining but then I just did it myself.”¹⁷²

Directors could get financial support for their auteur projects through *FEBIO*, whose

¹⁶⁸ Fero Fenič's authorised biography: http://www.ferofenic.cz/cz/text_fs.html (accessed 13 May, 2019).

¹⁶⁹ The film was released in 1990, that is after the regime change.

¹⁷⁰ “FERO FENIČ PORTRÉT,” Youtube, 27:10, November 9, 2017, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNO3FcVsrWc>.

¹⁷¹ Eva Zaoralová, “FEBIO,” 70.

¹⁷² Zaoralová, “FEBIO,” 71.

emergence was parallel to the privatisation of state film production studios. Great number of directors, cameramen and other film professionals would otherwise not be able to find job other than that in the advertising sector.¹⁷³ The first project of *FEBIO* was a documentary cycle *OKO: pohled na současnost* (EYE: the Present View), which was meant as a critical mirror of contemporary time. Fenič set up a group of directors, each of whom chose what they thought are relevant topics. Originally, the episodes were delivered to *Krátký film* (Short Film), which used to be a state studio producing documentary films, cartoons, and fairy tales. *Krátký film* provided facilities, funding, and included the *OKO* series into its programme sequence which ran on OK3. In a way, *OKO* can be seen as a post-socialist follow-up of the *Czechoslovak Film Weekly*, which also had been produced by *Krátký film*. Yet, *OKO* became a showcase of auteur documentary with each of its filmmakers laying bare their subjective position. The title itself, *OKO* (EYE), stood for the eye of the filmmaker, thus pointing to his or her positioned perspective.

The first episode *Odsud-potial* (From Here to Over There)¹⁷⁴ was made by Fenič and it took place in two little municipalities, one being the westernmost and the other the easternmost village of Czechoslovakia. The first *present view* thus came out from the peripheries and the protagonists of the documentary were lonesome villagers, some of them being Germans traumatised by vanishing of the legacy of their ancestors, and some of them being illiterate Rusyns who had no idea about the undergoing transformation or about the President Havel. The documentary premiered in April 1992 on the OK3 channel and it was met with immense viewers' and critical acclaim. In response, Ivo Mathé, by then CT director, offered to Fenič that CT would

¹⁷³ "Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1992."

¹⁷⁴ The documentary can be accessed online: "Fero Fenič: Odsud - Potial," Youtube, 21:23, May 23, 2013, accessed May 23, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02rJ5pWChH0&t=1016s>.

present *FEBIO*'s production at the prime time on the federal channel F1.¹⁷⁵ Since then, the *FEBIO* documentary series ran on F1 and later on CT1 and were without doubt the most popular Czech documentaries throughout the 1990s.

While at first Fenič made or supervised most of the *FEBIO*'s documentary production, he would later pass on new episodes on his FAMU colleagues, including the renowned directors such as Jan Němec, Věra Chytilová or Jan Špáta. Tens of young graduates were given a space to work on their projects as well as the opportunity to have them screened as episodes of *OKO* on CT. Young director Petr Václav, for instance, shot a documentary *About Racism* in 1994, racism becoming the primary concern of his later feature films. Many Slovak directors worked for *FEBIO* after the federation split apart. Ján Sebechlebský was in this regard one of the most prolific *FEBIO* filmmakers, being involved in *OKO*, *GEN*, and *Czech Soda*.

FEBIO's next project was *GEN* (GENE), an acronym standing for the *Gallery of the National Elite*. After a few episodes, *FEBIO* had to remove the expanded title from the opening scene and the programme was henceforth called *GEN—100 Čechů dneška* (GENE—100 Czechs Today). Fenič's original idea was to introduce the extraordinary personalities whose importance had been underrated under state socialism. Moreover, he aimed to restore the concept of the elite in its positive aspects since in his view the concept had corroded over the past decades. He, however, faced a clamour against using the term elite and CT's board decided to replace the subtitle with something more neutral. *100 Czechs Today*, though, led to another critical response since it was Fenič and the dramaturge Tomáš Motl whose choice was generating post-socialist canon of personalities. There was also an irony in that *GEN* premiered four days after the

¹⁷⁵ Fero Fenič, "Malá procházka dějinami Febia," in Fero Fenič, ed., *Fenomén FEBIO* (Prague: Febiofest, 2008), 13.

dissolution of Czechoslovakia and, unlike *OKO*, was only broadcast on Czech channels, starring Czech personalities. The reality behind the camera, though, was that a great number of film crew were Slovaks, including Fenič himself. At least at the beginning, Fenič had a major say on deciding which personalities were to be included. Thus, in the founding year of Czech independent state, it was Fenič from Eastern Slovakia who became the curator of a gallery of Czech post-socialist nationhood. *GEN* was broadcast every week since January 1993 at the prime time on CT1. It run between 1993—1994 and again between 2001—2002.¹⁷⁶ In 2017, CT returned to the project and since then has been producing new episodes.¹⁷⁷ The very first episode of *GEN* starred the Prime Minister Václav Klaus who was preparing for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.¹⁷⁸ The director of the first *GEN* was Juraj Jakubisko, by that time the most renowned Slovak director who, similarly to Fenič, did now wish for the split and his Czechoslovak sentiments made him stay in the Czech Republic. According to Fenič, the first episode of *GEN* watched 60% of the country's population.¹⁷⁹ This would mean that four days after the “Velvet Divorce” around five million people watched the portrait of Czech prime minister intimately captured by the famous personage of Slovak cinema.

For Fenič, *OKO* represented varieties of social reflection undertaken by talented filmmakers while the idea behind *GEN* was that of a constitution—*GEN* was projected as a post-

¹⁷⁶ Fero Fenič, ed., *Fenomén FEBIO* (Prague: Febiofest, 2008), 209.

¹⁷⁷ Since 2017 CT has been producing the new episodes with Fero Fenič as a head of the production team. Interestingly, now *The Gallery of the National Elite* is written in gold in the introductory subtitles.

¹⁷⁸ The first episode of *GEN* can be accessed on youtube: “Václav Klaus pohledem Juraje Jakubiska (GEN) - 1993,” Youtube, 14:59, April 16, 2011, accessed May 24, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgIK70p7k9Q>. The footprint in the documentary opening belongs to Fenič.

¹⁷⁹ Fero Fenič, “Malá procházka,” 19.

socialist pantheon, providing orientation by deciding on who was to be respected or remembered in the context of coming to terms with the state-socialist legacy. In both cases, the idea behind embarking on these series was that there is a vital need for providing orientation in the circumstantial flux of the early 1990s. *OKO* reflected on the current affairs while *GEN* was constituting a sense of reconfigured, post-socialist belonging. To complement these two projects and having on mind that quite an overwhelming part of the nation had their TVs turned on, Fenič articulated a new sense of urgency—in his view, the nation needed political satire as a way of democracy practice.¹⁸⁰

Fenič and his dramaturge Tomáš Motl approached Milan Tesař, a journalist from the *Reflex* journal and together they brainstormed about what should be the characteristics of the post-socialist satire. As Fenič stated, they had nothing to relate to since there had been nothing of this sort on CST before. It seemed to them that satire needed to be invented from scratch, that what they had on mind was an unprecedented TV format.¹⁸¹ Yet, “the invention” was rather a trans-mediation since what they did was listing all people performing humour. They came up with seventy people representing various professions and following different traditions. Tesař was determined to meet all of them at beer and familiarise them with the pioneering concept of *Czech Soda*: “It will be about mockery, satire, and dada. And, above all, everything will be permitted. I would like to see the producers of *Czech Soda* being expelled from their country.”¹⁸² Tesař wanted to make clear that there is no way for *Czech Soda* to fit into the existing framework of television entertainment and that partaking in it could mean losing rather than gaining a

¹⁸⁰ Fero Fenič, “Malá procházka,” 20.

¹⁸¹ Fero Fenič, “Malá procházka,” 20.

¹⁸²

reputation. He ended up with a pretty narrow circle of people, most of whom without reputation to loose. Namely, it was the editorial board of the satirical monthly journal *Sorry*,¹⁸³ Petr Čtvrtníček from the amateur theatre *Vrata* (The Gate), and the founding members of the *Sklep* theatre.

While Fenič recruited the director Václav Křístek together with some actors and non-actors for the project, Tesař asked his friends from *Sorry* journal to deliver satirical content for *Czech Soda*. Meanwhile, Fenič discussed the project with the producers in CT and Čestmír Kopecký became the liaison between *FEBIO* and CT. Regarding the protagonists of the show, the core of the show formed only gradually. Petr Čtvrtníček showed up in the first episodes but only starting with 1993 New Year's episode, he really became the leading protagonist. *Alles Gute* sketches starring *Sklep* actors Milan Šteindler and David Vávra first appeared in the second episode and then became vital part of each upcoming episode. Without doubt, Petr Čtvrtníček, Milan Šteindler, and David Vávra developed into the main personas of *Czech Soda* show by each episode and soon overstepped their roles of actors by taking charge of dramaturgy and direction. While Milan Šteindler and David Vávra were already quite known for their roles in Věra Chytilová's films,¹⁸⁴ it was *Czech Soda* which made Petr Čtvrtníček known among Czech TV audiences. Yet, all three of them began their acting careers in amateur theatres and engaged in semi-public performances prior to 1989. I believe that the amateur phase is decisive for the development of their professional aesthetics and I will elaborate on the context of their maverick

¹⁸³ The first issue of *Sorry* came out in March 1992 and it is still being published. There is both printed and online version of *Sorry* monthly. See the webpages of the journal, "Časopis Sorry," accessed May 15, 2019, <http://www.sorry.cz/casopis-sorry/>.

¹⁸⁴ Both starred in her 1988 film *A Hoof Here, a Hoof There*, which deals with late socialist alienation and with the generational nihilism. It is also the first Czech film about AIDS.

performances in the first two sections of the following chapter. In this way, I will account for the ingredients which with time fermented into the gurgle of *Czech Soda*.

4. Czech Soda: Democracy Exam

4.1. Ascension of *The Cellar*

The fourteen-year olds Milan Šteindler and David Vávra were meeting in the house of David Vávra's grandmother. In her cellar, they founded a theatre *Sklep* (Cellar) in 1971. Over the course of several years, some of their friends joined them and, in 1978, they collectively applied to the theatre academy in Prague (DAMU). During their admission exams, they had staged a heavy storm pelting the academic jury with hailstones and they were consequently dismissed. However, they continued with their amateur practice and befriended other amateur groups such as *Vpřed* (Forward), *Křeč* (Schism), and *Mimosa*. Meanwhile, Milan Šteindler graduated from Prague Film Academy (FAMU) and many of the *Sklep* members became professionals in fields closely related with film or theatre. David Vávra became an architect, though interestingly, he practiced irony and mystification even in his architectonic field.



Figure 3. David Vávra and Milan Šteindler—two classmates who founded *Sklep*. Photograph by Petr Beneš.

The contacts between the Prague amateur theatre groups intensified in the 1980s and joint performances were taking place quite often. Tomáš Vorel, a film director who belonged both to *Sklep* and *Mimosa*, decided to work with these theatre groups on his debut film.¹⁸⁵ The film premiered in the Spring of 1989 and the title *Pražská 5* (The Prague Five) referred to the five groups *Vpřed*, *Křeč*, *Sklep*, *Mimosa*, and *Kolotoč* (Merry-Go-Round). The film was divided into five storylines each of which showcased a different theatrical style.

The storyline of *Sklep*¹⁸⁶ was an adaptation of socialist realist genre in which the pathetic behaviour of the protagonists could not be taken at face value in the late socialist context. The anachronistic identification with the socialist realist style showed the awkwardness of taking the already emptied ideological formulas seriously. In a sense, the *Sklep*'s sequence can be seen as closely related with late Soviet “stioč”—it also could not be rebuked from the position of the contemporary hegemonic ideology since it operated *within* it. Yet, the weird effect of taking the hegemonic ideology seriously in the late socialist condition revealed that ideology under late state socialism did not relate as much to lived or anticipated “socialist reality” as it related to the self-referential “officiality and “one’s pretence misrecognition of it”¹⁸⁷ In other words, the parodied socialist realist performance of *Sklep* exposed the situation in which people participated in the official sphere of ideology while nobody believed in the literal sense of the ideological discourse.

¹⁸⁵ Zdeněk Kovář, “The Five from Prague art companies ‘before’ and ‘after’: Generation companies and their change of media presentation and reception in the changed historical context after November 89” (Master Thesis, Charles University, 2012), accessed May 17, 2019, <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/95679>, 17—18.

¹⁸⁶ See the excerpt “PRAŽSKÁ PĚTKA - Nejlepší scény filmu,” Youtube, 5:38, July 22, 2014, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmPjnic71g0>.

¹⁸⁷ Yurchak, “The Cynical Reason,” 182.

I believe one more example can help me explain the effect of *Sklep*'s performance, so let me paraphrase Slavoj Žižek's thoughts regarding the musical performance of the Slovenian music group *Laibach*.¹⁸⁸ Žižek opposes the assumption that, in the late capitalist ideology, irony and distance is per se a subversive tool capable of undermining the system. He claims that the inherent condition of contemporary system's functioning is "that its own ideology must not be taken seriously. In other words, cynicism is today's prevailing mode of ideology."¹⁸⁹ The critical distance represented in the reeling out of Soviet Anekdoty¹⁹⁰ was therefore far from subverting the social consensus since the cynical attitude towards the regime's ideological catechism paradoxically legitimised conformist behaviour. Therefore, the only way to undermine the current mode of ideology according to Žižek is in acting out the strategy of radical identification with the dominant ideology.

In re-situating Žižek's argument to describe the operation of late socialist ideology, Yurchak argued that rather than the oppositional or alternative discourse, it was the practice of discursive over-identification which led to a fatal destabilisation of regime's popular legitimacy.¹⁹¹ Without fully submitting to this perspective, I believe it lends us sensibility to understand the way in which Vorel's film might have been subversive. Indeed, the film was characterised as "an engaged resistance to the social, emotional, and spiritual apathy" in the

¹⁸⁸ The video excerpt in which Žižek comments on Laibach is available on youtube. "What the hell is Laibach all about?" Youtube, 3:18, March 11, 2009, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BZl8ScVYvA>.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Alexei Yurchak, "The Cynical Reason," 182.

¹⁹¹ See Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*.

contemporary film review.¹⁹² The review went further: “Dear spectator, are you having fun? Or are you leaving the cinema auditorium? In both cases, let me remind you that the staging you see is your world, too.”¹⁹³

The success of the 1989 film *The Five from Prague* popularised the Prague amateur theatres to a wider audience. *Sklep* was the most visited one among them and it was also the only theatre group which managed to perform regularly in the first post-socialist decade. After November 1989, *Sklep* continued to perform its flagship programme called *Besídka* (The Party). The ensemble also decided to stage Václav Havel’s first play *Life Ahead* under a new title *Mlýny* (Mills). Besides the incorporation of Havel’s play and the growing audience of *Sklep*, their use of parody remained the same, judging from the theatre review of one of their *Besídkas*: “Only second-rate comedians are using parody with the aim to ridicule something. *Sklep* is different. Just as the pop art does not ridicule the Campbell soup, *Sklep* does not mock the everyday banality [...]. It tackles the banality with a great fondness and consistency, so that the viewers cannot but recognise themselves in this pop art of life. The allegory is crystal clear.”¹⁹⁴

The specific aesthetics of *Sklep* captivated Věra Chytilová, who cast Vávra and Šteindler in many of her movies. Notably, Šteindler played W. A. Mozart in her 1991 film *The People of Prague Understand Me*. Chytilová conceived of *Sklep*’s aesthetics as going beyond their theatrical performance. She once stated that, rather than a theatre ensemble, she considered *Sklep* to be a movement,¹⁹⁵ consisting of proponents of aesthetic cynicism, representing thus the late

¹⁹² Michal Bartušek, “Pražská 5,” *Kino* 15 (1989): 15.

¹⁹³ Bartušek, “Pražská 5,” 15.

¹⁹⁴ Jan Kolář, “Hraje divadlo Sklep,” *Scéna* 11 (1991): 13.

¹⁹⁵ Petr Hájek, “Mlýny,” *Reflex* 21 (1991), 15.

socialist generation. Certainly, she did not mean an avant-garde kind of movement since it would be difficult to draw a straight line between the situated aesthetics and ethics of *Sklep* on the one hand, and the critical role of avant-garde *Osvobozené divadlo* (Liberated Theatre) in interwar Czechoslovakia on the other hand.¹⁹⁶ The context of *Sklep* also differed from the situatedness of famous theatres in the 1960s—*Divadlo Na zábradlí* (Theatre on the Balustrade),¹⁹⁷ and *Divadlo Za branou* (Behind the Gate Theatre)¹⁹⁸ in that its alternativeness did not instigate state repercussions. *Sklep* was neither an oppositional theatre nor did the state-socialist regime provide it with oppositional status as was the case with the music band *The Plastic People of the Universe*¹⁹⁹ which shifted from alternative into oppositional status by being prosecuted. *Sklep* was different in that it operated undisturbed by the apparatus of state control because the regime allowed for certain parallel activities in its late phase. Here I would disagree with the assertion of the theatre scholar Vladimír Just that the state-socialist regime apparatus feared both oppositional

¹⁹⁶ *Osvobozené divadlo* was an avant-garde theatre based in Prague in the interwar period. Its main influences were dadaism, poetism, and surrealism. The theatre was part of the leftist avant-garde movement *Devětsil* and the plays often stood for the political commentaries. Since 1930s, a strong anti-fascist orientation started to define the repertoire. This eventually led to the theatre closure in November 1938 and to the forced exile of its major stars, Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich.

¹⁹⁷ I already indicated the importance of *Divadlo na Zábradlí*, which was the main Prague scene of absurd and existential theatre in the 1960s.

¹⁹⁸ *Divadlo Za branou* (Behind the Gate Theatre) was one of the most renowned Prague theatres in the 1960s, though short-lived. It only operated between 1965 and 1972. The theatre attempted a comeback after 1989 but it was again closed down since the Ministry of Culture withdrew financial support. See the documentary about the theatre and its chief director Otomar Krejča “Krejča za branou,” Česká televize, 57:01, premiered November 21, 2006, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/1181687280-krejca-za-branou>.

¹⁹⁹ *The Plastic People of the Universe* is a music band which used to be an important part of the Czechoslovak underground scene in the 1970s and 1980s. The members of the band were arrested and sentenced to several months in prison in 1976. This particular court case led to intensive debates in the dissident circles and to the formation of *Charter 77*.

and autonomous culture and intervened against both with similar intensity.²⁰⁰ While I would argue that many autonomous cultural forms were indeed met with state repercussions, be it propagandistic campaigns,²⁰¹ state violence or sanctions, the late 1980s saw a rise of a semiofficial cultural sphere, which from autonomous positions critiqued various aspects of late socialist life. There were people who participated in this sphere and at the same time did not define their activities primarily in oppositional terms. Thus, the critical cultural production of the semiofficial sphere was deeply ambiguous with regard to its aesthetics and ethics in that it did not fall under the traditional dichotomies of pro-regime/oppositional, conformist/nonconformist or official/nonofficial. Some films and documentaries of the late 1980s, for example, were not using parallel cultural infrastructure, and yet they constituted a segment of the critical cultural scene. While some of these films were banned from being distributed, some got through.²⁰²

For many *Sklep* members, their engagement with amateur theatre complemented their professional careers in the official sphere. Šteindler and Vorel made films at Barrandov and Vávra was an architect. In their case, semiofficial cultural practice kept hypertrophying into their

²⁰⁰ Vladimír Just, “Divadlo—Pokus o vymezení,” in *Alternativní kultura: příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*, ed. Josef Alan (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2001), 457.

²⁰¹ Notorious case is the police operation “Vlasatci” (The Long-haired) in 1966, which resulted in the mass detentions and forced haircuts of thousands of long-haired men. The operation was accompanied by nationwide campaigns targeted against the “distasteful” haircuts of young men. See Petr Blažek and Filip Pospíšil, *Vraťte nám vlasy!: první máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu* (Prague: Academia, 2010).

²⁰² I already referred to Věra Chytilová’s 1988 film *A Hoof Here, A Hoof There* about AIDS. Karel Smyczek’s *Proč?* (Why?) from 1987 addressed the football hooliganism and violence. There were also unsettling documentaries juxtaposing the official discourse about advanced socialism with the lifeworld of young people who chose drugs and homelessness to escape the suffocating prospects of hypocritical adulthood under late socialism. See for example the 1988 documentary *...Aby si lidi všimli* (...So that people can notice) by Vladislav Kvasnička: “(Aby si lidi všimli 1988),” Youtube, 19:43, October 6, 2013, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijmSish0ZUU>.

official careers. *Sklep*'s situatedness beyond the binary notions was in my view the thing which captivated Chytilová and motivated her to cast *Sklep* members in her films. After the 1989 regime change, *Sklep*'s ambiguity remoulded into yet another shape—while becoming famous for their sharp-edged TV satire, Vávra and Šteindler pursued careers in the fields they were most keen on ridiculing. Vávra hosted an “earnest” TV show *Šumná města* (Effervescent Towns) between 1995-2008, while Šteindler broke through as a talented director of commercials. In this manner, they themselves reproduced the subject matter of their parodical performances.

4.2. Three Nice (Non-)Events Just Before the Return of History

One of the dominant early post-socialist perspectives on the period defined by the state-socialist rule was that of a loss. It has been often asserted in the public discourse that the Czech nation lost four decades of its history as it had been caught in the communist confinement. The state-socialist era has been characterised as imposed, violent diversion from what has been imagined as an organic national development. The communist takeover made the nation depart from “the right” pattern of development and what followed was the general degradation. The suggested approach for tackling the loss and the state of decay was returning to the once abandoned track

and catching up with the Western European countries.²⁰³ The Czech variant of catching up paradigm has been analysed by the historian Michal Kopeček²⁰⁴ as being inseparable from the post-socialist projects of coming to terms with the past. The idea that the state-socialist era was somehow ahistorical and that society got stuck and did not move forward referred to the experience of post-invasion Czechoslovakia and of the so-called “normalisation.”²⁰⁵ Yet, it was common in political discourse to extrapolate the ideological climate of those years to the whole state-socialist rule. In this subsection, I want to look at how the notion of ahistoricity was articulated during the “normalisation” years. Specifically, I will focus on three performances undertaken by Petr Čvrtníček in 1988.

²⁰³ The catching up motive appears also in the *Týdeník Televize*, namely in the essay by Pavel Škrob: “Recently I talked to experts from Swiss consulting company. [...] They claimed that who is ambitious and wants to have a career becomes automatically suspicious here. A self-assertive entrepreneur is labelled here as evil. A simple, forgiving, and negligent person, on the other hand, is labelled as good. However, there are different labels in the market economy—successful and unsuccessful are superior to our model of evil and good. They argued that incompetent people are fired while competent people get care and education in the developed world. Here, we are reeducating the incompetent to become competent while the already competent ones are waiting to no avail. They concluded that there is no third way. Either we preserve what we have and maintain our fire in the cave while everyone else uses lightbulbs, or we simply forget about our past, give up our securities, and resolutely embark on catching up what we have wasted. [...] Those decent consultants arrived here in limousines, looked through the keyhole to see the dusky hall, talked smart, and returned again to join the champions of the world after they had had the good grace to console us outsiders. And we are left with the doubts. What if they were right? What if really need to depart away from our legacies to become restored as agents in the world of market economy? Every one of us, always and everywhere. What if the collapse of our industry is in our vital interest? What if we should wish for the Titans of industry, which swallow the state subsidies in the way Kronos swallowed his offsprings, to disgorge tens of thousands of unemployed so that the ones who remain in jobs become more efficient and catch up on their lenient, sloppy habits?” Pavel Škrob, “Dohnat, co jsme zameškali,” *Týdeník Televize* 44 (1990): 3.

²⁰⁴ Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, “Introduction: Towards an Intellectual History of Post-Socialism,” in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 1-36.

²⁰⁵ See Petr Bílek and Blanka Čínátlová, eds., *Tesilová kavalerie: Popkulturní obrazy normalizace* (Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2010).

Petr Čtvrtníček and Zdeněk Suchý, members of *Vrata* (The Gate) theatre, started an improvised film company *Krásný Film Praha* (The Beautiful Film Prague)²⁰⁶ and produced three short films in 1988. The films were alluding to the “normalisation” TV news, namely to the non-eventful character of the “normalisation” media events. Each of the films starred Čtvrtníček as a reporter who provided the viewers with information from the field. Čtvrtníček parodied the voice of the real CST reporter Jan Stuchlík as well as the discourse of the TV news. Primarily, however, the main point of these films was questioning the very genre of the “normalisation” reports.

In *Cigárko* (Cigarette),²⁰⁷ the TV reporter visits a little town to meet a man in front of a grocery store. The man gives the reporter a cigarette. In the next shot, the reporter speaks to the camera while the man distributing cigarettes appears in the background: “What you’ve just seen was exactly what we came here for. Václav Beneš, after negotiations with the municipal Service Centre, agreed to provide the passersby with a cigarette. You might be thinking that this is a useless service. But... what a cigarette.” In *Ryby* (Fish),²⁰⁸ Čtvrtníček visited people who were fishing. After talking to a pair of boys who reported that they did not get any fish yet, Čtvrtníček again faces the camera: “The boys don’t know that there is no fish here. But that’s not important. It is not about fish after all. To organise such a beautiful event—that’s what really matters.” The

²⁰⁶ There was a real existing company *Krátký film Praha* (The Short Film Prague) which produced short films, cartoons, and documentaries. The pronunciation of *krásný* and *krátký* is similar and it worked clearly as an allusion.

²⁰⁷ “Čtvrtníček 1988 - Cigárko,” Youtube, 1:34, May 27, 2008, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQIaq0AhpWE>.

²⁰⁸ “Čtvrtníček 1988 - Ryby,” Youtube, 0:47, February 15, 2014, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOw15hM-XF8>.

third film *Problematika* (Question)²⁰⁹ stands for the climax of the non-eventful triad. Čtvrtníček stands somewhere outside: “Recently, we have seen that the Youth Question has been in the spotlight. No wonder. The young generation is indeed worth paying attention. Why do I mention this: Recently, something unpleasant happened to one youth. Organisation is to blame in this case. We wanted to know the answer and so we set off.” The next shot presents Čtvrtníček on the muddy road in-between the forest and the field: “We were very close to solving the question. We got to know that things were really not alright. Judging from the answers we got, we suppose that this was a wrong solution. Some voices kept saying that this was ‘unfair’ and we also heard someone claiming that this was entirely ‘nonfair’—which is not a very common term indeed. The answers did not make us satisfied. We continued further and asked authorised persons.” The new scene shows Čtvrtníček in the open field: “Here, it was told to us openly that the situation was considerably far from being alright.”

Čtvrtníček’s performances in all three cases refer to unintended Kafkaesque qualities of “normalisation” TV news reporting. While in the first two films he pointed to the banal occurrences presented on CST as events worthy of attention, in *Problematika* he parodied the journalistic discourse which was failing to convey any meaningful information. I consider the production of *Krásný Film Praha* to be an articulate recognition of the role which state-socialist media played in producing non-events as official representations of reality.

All three films replicate the representative style of CST news and relate to two aspects of CST reporting which are typical not only of “normalisation” television but also of “normalisation” public discourse in general. *Cigárko* and *Ryby* show the everydayness of the

²⁰⁹ “Čtvrtníček 1988 - Problematika,” Youtube, 1:12, May 27, 2009, accessed May 19, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RArjGHi9Q>.

country's peripheries just like CST emphasised the micro-perspective in its news reporting. In CST news as well as in the *Czechoslovak Film Weekly*,²¹⁰ the everyday life of ordinary people was juxtaposed with the canonical events such as Party meetings, fulfilling the targets of the planned economy, state visits, and world affairs. This juxtaposition was indeed deeply rooted in the style of state-socialist news reporting and it is worthwhile to delineate its trajectory to get a nuanced idea about how everydayness was represented by the “normalisation” media apparatus.

Showing the heroic aspects of everyday life, or rather refashioning everyday life into heroic deeds, was one of the dominant repertoires of socialist realist documentary. This is well reflected in the *Czechoslovak Film Weekly* series from the 1950s and early 1960s, where the endeavours of ordinary people, shown in very concrete forms, were conceived of as integral to accomplishing the country's transformation towards Communist modernity. Starting from the 1960s, TV journalists like Otta Bednářová²¹¹ and Jindřich Fairaizl radically turned away from this genre template and inherent meta-narratives of socialist realism and instead made investigative documentaries within which they made transparent their positions as well as their

²¹⁰ *Czechoslovak Film Weekly* was screened between 1953 to 1989 in cinemas before the main film. It was preceded by *Týden ve filmu* (A week in the film) running in 1945—1946) and by *Československé filmové noviny* (Czechoslovak Film News) running in 1946—1953. There is an online archive with more than a thousand episodes, yet only accessible on the territory of Czech Republic. “Československý filmový týdeník,” Česká televize, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelivize.cz/porady/1130615451-ceskoslovensky-filmovy-tydenik/dily/>.

²¹¹ Otta Bednářová worked in the Czechoslovak Radio from 1950 until 1963 she left for CST. Her programmes were among the first which openly dealt with the life behind the facade of happy life in socialism. Her famous programme was *The Right to Health* in which she investigated the level of healthcare accessibility and the relations between doctors and patients. In CST, she prepared the programme *The Curious Camera* which ran once in two weeks and reflected on existential and social problematics. Discussions in *The Curious Camera* were even live broadcasted. In 1970, Bednářová was fired from CST for her pro-reform orientation. She was among the first signatories of Charter 77 and, one year later, she co-founded VONS (Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted). Eva Ješutová, “Otta Bednářová slaví devadesátku,” Český rozhlas, June 18, 2017, accessed May 28, 2019, https://www.rozhlas.cz/archiv/zamikrofonem/_zprava/otta-bednarova-slavi-devadesatku--1735693.

subjective takes on the represented issues. The most profound change came in 1968 with many documentary programmes running on CST and as a part of the *Czechoslovak Film Weekly*, which followed the aesthetics and ethics of *cinema vérité*²¹² without any meta-narrator voiceover whatsoever. The CST crews shot the meetings of workers in the small villages and the debates of unknown workers from peripheries were thus transmitted through the centralised media apparatus.²¹³ I would argue in this regard that besides the end of censorship, providing for the peripheral voices was a key element of the media democratisation during Prague Spring.

The post-invasion reforms led to a profound reorganisation of media field and the Prague Spring journalist style then disappeared together with the sidelined pro-reform journalists.²¹⁴ Yet, the post-invasion purges and the tightened ideological control meant that TV journalism resorted neither to ideologically lucid genre templates of everyday heroism nor to the exclusive focus on officialised political rituals and asymptomatic events. Rather, TV continued to report on the aspects of everyday life, including the notorious problems of shortages. There was one thing, however, which was completely missing from the “normalisation” coverage of ordinary people and which is in my view crucial for understanding what happened to official discourse after the invasion: the everyday life with its “casual” problems, banal aspects, and cyclical rhythms was

²¹² *Cinema Vérité* was a movement in the documentary filmmaking related to the observational cinema but strongly reflecting on the position of the filmmaker. It was particularly influential in the 1960s and 1970s. A key documentary which relates to this aesthetics within the Czechoslovak context is the 1968 film *Spříznění volbou* (Elective Affinities) which maps the reform process of Prague Spring, namely the political development in March, 1968. The documentary can be accessed on YouTube: “Spříznění volbou dokumentarní 1968,” YouTube, 1:23:10, June 28, 2015, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyvxboWBcnE>.

²¹³ See for example the meeting of CST journalists with the workers at MEOPTA in Hynčice. “Meopta Hynčice,” Česká televize, premiered July 12, 1968, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1064348630-kam-spejeme/26853119028-meopta-hyncice>.

²¹⁴ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer*, 35—60.

portrayed as apolitical. While the “normalisation” media paid attention to some problematic aspects of everydayness, they did so by completely stripping existing problems of their political dimension and by re-coding them into slight malfunctions of otherwise harmonious system. At the same time, the media discourse already anticipated the rectification of discrepancies, reflecting thus the increasingly technocratic discourse of Party Nomenklatura about the gradual advancement of socialist society.²¹⁵ This resulted in overall trivialisation of media events which again shifted the notion of what counted as an event. Far from being a “rupture in being”²¹⁶ or the awakening of an emancipatory subject, the event acquired the status of a curiosity in the media discourse of late socialist Czechoslovakia. Thus, it became normal in the “normalisation” period to report on the congress of all villages which bear name *Lhota* or on the congress of DIY men who construct multi-seated vehicles.²¹⁷

Čtvrtníček’s performance pointed to what happened to the event in “normalisation” media discourse. He chose to parody such curiosity events circulating in media by using two themes—cigarettes and fish. Both smoking and fishing might have been seen as relaxing activities, a personal satisfaction met either by means of a smoking habit or by a pensive hobby. Those two activities are indeed linked to a free, personal time, a private enjoyment and I would argue that Čtvrtníček’s thematic choice had to do with what the scholars of “normalisation” Czechoslovakia describe as an extension of private and domesticated sphere over the world of

²¹⁵ Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2011), 75–94.

²¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

²¹⁷ See the compilation of curiosities in the online archive of CT24 channel: “Sranda must být!,” Česká televize, premiere of the compilation on December 31, 2018, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10116288585-archiv-ct24/218411058210011/video/611041>. Specifically, I refer to the excerpts “Sjezd obcí s názvem Lhota” from 1981 and “Sraz majitelů vícemístných kol” from 1987.

politics.²¹⁸ Acting out the private and family values in what was constituted as a media sphere was a deliberate strategy pursued by CST “normalisation” director Jan Zelenka to ensure that media take on their roles of consolidators in the post-invasion context.

Thus, the “normalisation” CST programme schemes and news dramaturgy were designed to underpin the social stability by accentuating the private sphere as a site of both personal self-realisation and authentic sociability. Paulina Bren went even further to describe private sphere as the sole mode in which citizenship was authorised to be acted out in the late socialist Czechoslovakia.²¹⁹ Drawing on this perspective, I would argue that the official discourse of “events” in the Czechoslovak “normalisation” constituted events out of cyclical occasions (Party meetings, economic plans) and curious happenings deprived of political significance. The rationale behind it was to endorse the “normalisation” status quo in which the political stability was a result of enforced post-invasion withdrawal from participating in the public sphere. *Cigárko* and *Ryby* thus could be seen as perfect ways of civic disengagement—by being apolitical, peaceful, and enjoyable, both smoking and fishing became ends in themselves.

It is worth approaching *Cigárko* and *Ryby* through the prism of Yurchak’s theorisation about “stiob” because Čtvrtníček parodies the “normalisation” event without providing any ironic metacommentary.²²⁰ He in fact embraces the ephemerality and ahistoricity of his two events because they are nice. While it is the quality of having a cigarette which provided Čtvrtníček with an objective, in *Ryby* the objective is not about catching fish but rather about the

²¹⁸ Petr Roubal, *Československé spartakiády* (Prague: Academia, 2016), 216–217.

²¹⁹ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer*, 159.

²²⁰ “One of the key characteristics of stiob irony was that its identification with its object was unaccompanied by metacommentary on its ironic procedure. In other words, stiob was a ‘straight,’ deep caricature that usually did not signal its own ironic purpose.” Boyer and Yurchak, “American STIOB,” 181.

enjoyable activity itself. The key message of Čtvrtníček's two performances is that only those social actions deserved coverage which were decorating the facade of a consolidated society and which did not seek any agenda except of perpetuating calm atmosphere.

In *Problematika*, Čtvrtníček examines how the “normalisation” discourse, in which the term “reform” was an avoided word, responded to the critical turn signalled by perestroika and glasnost policies in the Soviet Union. The situation in Czechoslovakia did not allow for a straight adoption of reformist and critical discourse since it would straightforwardly bring up the revision of Prague Spring. The “normalisation” nomenklatura, however, built up its legitimacy upon saving the country from the psychosis of Prague Spring²²¹ reformist discourse and revising the late 1960s would thus mean fatally undermining the nomenklatura's own position. Therefore, the adoption of a new political course introduced by Gorbachev took on a rather ambiguous shape in the context of Czechoslovak journalism. This was manifested by an in-between position of allowing only for vague criticisms while at the same time postulating technocratic solutions. And I believe it was this ambiguity of sober and non-referential criticism which made Čtvrtníček engage in *Problematika*: “We were very close to solving the question. We got to know that things were really not alright. [...] The answers did not make us satisfied. We continued further and asked authorised persons.”

²²¹ One of the most interesting official interpretations of Prague Spring from “normalisation” is the 25th episode of *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* which is emblematically called *A Chase* and is situated in 1968. The Communist reformists are represented as being crooked while the popular support of 1968 reforms here stands for mass disorientation and psychosis caused as if by virus. Notably, rather than being in the forefront of the episode, the context of reformism is rather on the background of the plot. See “30 případů Majora Zemana - 25 Šťvanice celý film cz HD 1968,” Youtube, 1:21:35, November 3, 2018, accessed May 23, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlrMUbdDndEg>.



Figure 4. Petr Čtvrtníček in the amateur film *Problematika* produced in 1988 by *Krásný film*. Screenshot from YouTube.

By analysing Čtvrtníček's "normalisation" performances I wanted to emphasise his strategy of engaging with the media discourse of late "normalisation" period. It seems appropriate to establish a link between his performances and the unsettling effect of Soviet stio. Yet, I believe that there is more to the unsettling effect than it just being over-identification with the style of the late-socialist official discourse. The over-identification ran not only along the lines of genre and style of CST news reporting but also took into consideration situated ideological implications, namely the specific construction of the event and the Kafkaesque implementation of perestroika discourse.

Čtvrtníček's engagement with "normalisation" CST news corresponds with how Petr Lébl engaged with the genre of intellectual debate on CT a few years later. However, by no means could Čtvrtníček's performances be broadcast on "normalisation" CST. As I argued

earlier, the mystification in both cases drew on the repertoire of cultural codes ranging from the “theatres of small forms” to Czechoslovak New Wave cinema. It is more difficult, however, to explain what factors contributed to the profound shift of aesthetics which would define Čtvrtníček’s, Šteindler’s, and Vávra’s *Czech Soda* performances. Let me now turn to the circumstances which led Čtvrtníček’s face to become the emblem of *Czech Soda*.

4.3. Hang-Over Treatment: Branding *Czech Soda*

I am very afraid of the new project which we called *Czech Soda*. It will come out on June 4, 1993 and it will be both the first political satire and nation-wide test of democracy. I hope we will be capable of ridiculing ourselves.²²²

On June 4, 1993, Václav Havel delivered a speech to television viewers: “My fellow citizens, you haven’t heard any good jokes from state officials for forty years. A change is coming. For you haven’t yet got drunk from the bottle full of sparkle. I am very happy that, after so many boring years, we can finally drink from the spring of authentic Czech Soda.”²²³ The sketch was taken from Havel’s first New Year’s Eve speech in 1990 and, with his voice dubbed, it was made into the first Czech Soda news report.

Despite being a short sequence, it encapsulated three tropes which are constitutive of the *Czech Soda* genre. First of all, it was the officialness of public discourse which was here undermined by the voice over. Havel was shown in the situation typical of Czechoslovak presidents—delivering a speech on New Year’s Eve. Yet, he brought the change by anticipating

²²² Jiří Trapek, *Týdeník Televize* 25 (1993): 5.

²²³ “Česká Soda 1.díl,” YouTube, 10:02, premiered on CT June 4, 1993, published on YouTube October 31, 2009, accessed May 29, 2019.

that politics is about to become fun. And it was exactly this contrast of officialised form and fresh content which gave the sketch an emotional push. In this way, the collective behind the first episode reenacted the contrasting effect of Havel's original speech delivered in 1990 which juxtaposed the officialness of Havel's appearance with the referential strength of his speech.

The second trope had to do with the focus on the past in negotiating of the present condition. Havel's voice(over) established the quality of the present moment by referring to the vaguely defined past decades. The present was thus discursively established through referencing the usually traumatic or contentious aspects of collective memory. The juxtaposition of past and present struggles ran as a common strategy throughout all of the episodes while the struggles were made into banal dichotomies, leading to sitcom-like unravellings.

The third trope related to the branding, namely branding Czech satire as a commodity. *Czech Soda's* opening scene showed a glass bottle rising over the horizon accompanied by Richard Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra*.²²⁴ The scene attempted to portray *Czech Soda* as a redemptive announcement which finally occurred after it had been intensely anticipated. *Czech Soda* arose shiny from the idyllic landscape of the Czech countryside, substituting for the sun, providing the country with dizziness of sparkles mixed with sober transparency of water.

²²⁴ See the opening scene of the first episode "Česká soda 1.díl," YouTube, 10:02, premiered on CT June 4, 1993, published on YouTube October 31, 2009, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKU7CkzTFfM&t=46s>.



Figure 5. The opening scene of *Czech Soda* series, CT, June 4, 1993. Screenshot from YouTube.

These three tropes—the intervention into an officialised conduct, the reading of the present condition through historical lens, and the imitation of the commercial style—can be considered as dominant characteristics of the satirical operation of *Czech Soda*. At the same time, *Czech Soda* was a the microcosm of TV broadcast schemes in that it consisted of a series of sketches which related to familiar programmes and genres and even incorporated archival records and re-running of recent TV content. The format of *Czech Soda* evolved gradually and divergently since there was a fluctuation among the crew members. Thus, despite Fenič, Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, and Vávra being continuously involved, the composition of sketches differed significantly as did the thematic targets of parody. While having its core in Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, Vávra and the

collective around the *Sorry* satirical journal, *Czech Soda* was also an elastic programme format, shaped by those who made it. Furthermore, the episodes alluded to actual issues in that they drew on the focal points of media discourse. While there was a strong focus on Slovak related issues in the episodes from 1993 to 1994, the later episodes referred to Slovakia less often. In 1994, the visual aesthetics of *Czech Soda* changed due to the emergence of private broadcaster TV Nova, and several visual references reflected on the entity of the private broadcaster.

Owing to the rearrangements among the crew members and the changing focal points of genre and thematic composition, the itemisation of people, genre nuances, and themes would take a lot of space which I would rather dedicate to the analysis of the commonalities, recurrent formal strategies and overarching tropes. Therefore, I will briefly outline and partially reiterate the production and broadcasting context of *Czech Soda* and then analyse the show by arranging its genres into these categories—the news, TV debates, commercials, and language courses. Each of the categories will be given a separate subsection.

4.3.1. Distaste On-Air

Czech Soda, comprised of 16 episodes, ran on CT between 1993 and 1997. The episodes were approximately 15 minutes long and were broadcast irregularly, but once in two months on average.²²⁵ The first few episodes premiered on CT1, at the primetime (usually after 9pm) on Saturday. They were later re-run on CT2. The episodes were popular with audiences and the first episodes regularly ranked among top ten in the viewership ratings.²²⁶ The programme was

²²⁵ Fero Fenič, ed., *Fenomén Febio* (Prague: Febiofest, 2008), 199.

²²⁶ See the ranking for the week August 23—August 29. *Czech Soda* is ranked ninth on CT1. “2x10 nejsledovanějších,” *Týdeník televize* 40 (1993): 2.

initiated by Fenič and Tesař and there were quite a few directors involved. Besides Šteindler, there were fresh FAMU graduates Jan Hřebejk, Igor Chaun and Petr Zelenka and it was in those years when they developed into renowned filmmakers. While Zelenka used his unused *Czech Soda* scripts in his 1997 film *Knoflíkáři* (The Buttoners), Hřebejk became famous for his 1999 film *Pelišky* (Cosy Dens). Fenič and Václav Křístek were involved especially in the first episodes but soon Čtvrtníček and Šteindler took over and after 1995 they were the only directors in charge.²²⁷ The narrowing of the creative unit echoed in the better flow as well as in the more coherent interlinkages between the sketches within the episode. Besides the episodes, there were two special New Year's Eve editions in 1993 and 1994 and one feature film directed by Fenič in 1998. These were edited versions of the original episodes with some additions. Regarding the New Year's Eve of 1993, *Czech Soda* was broadcast on CT2 at 8:05pm,²²⁸ before the political cabaret of Bubílková & Šimek²²⁹ and popular “estrada” of Vladimír Menšík.

The fact that these special editions were made accounted for the significant audience response. Yet, based on the viewers' letters and the critics' reviews, *Czech Soda* was met more often with indignation and disgust and seldom with enthusiasm. The overall audience and critical rejection of *Czech Soda* even led Fenič to announce the end of the project soon after the premiere of first episode: “I like the idea of *Soda* but the result did not meet my expectations. I am happy that we were the first to experiment with this genre but I am afraid that both the audience and

²²⁷ Fenič, ed. *Fenomén Febio*, 199.

²²⁸ “31.12.,” *Týdeník televize* 53/1 (1993/1994): 41.

²²⁹ Bubílková & Šimek hosted a satirical programme *S politiky netančím* (I do not dance with politicians) on CT in the second half of the 1990s.

FEBIO failed to pass the democracy exam.”²³⁰ He therefore decided to finish the first five episodes and then stop. At that time Fenič was confronted with fierce criticism expressed for instance in the letter to CT by Gustav Fifka from Klatovy:

I cannot be silent about the programme which was broadcasted on Saturday in prime time—the programme called *Czech Soda*. To be faceless, void of beliefs, and disrespectful of any value, to be against everyone and everything, that is the most rudimentary tactics of populists. I admit, it performs well in our political situation. This ‘philosophy’ transmitted on TV is perhaps more effective than a written word. To put it politely, it is distasteful to devalue all the positive things we’ve got and to think that this is dada, black humour, or a funny mystification.²³¹

Theatre critic Vladimír Just responded to *Czech Soda* in *Literární noviny* (Literature Review) by claiming that he passed the test of democracy and considered himself a democrat and yet he found the humour of *Czech Soda* stupid.²³² *Czech Soda* was discussed during the July 1993 meeting of RRTV, too. RRTV found *Czech Soda* to be on the edge of violating the law since it not only went beyond common decency regarding the “Czech internal” issues but also targeted Slovaks and Germans.²³³ After the premiere of fourth episode, the CT director Ivo Mathé welcomed Fenič’s decision to end the project and expressed his view that *Czech Soda* was not the satire which people would need.²³⁴

²³⁰ Fero Fenič in Mirka Spáčilová’s review in *Mladá fronta Dnes*, July 8, 1993, in “Napsali o televizi,” *Týdeník televize* 32 (1993): 3.

²³¹ Gustav Fifka, “Česká Soda,” *Týdeník televize* 28 (1993): 2.

²³² Vladimír Just’s review in *Literární noviny*, May (sic!) 17, 1993, in “Napsali o televizi,” *Týdeník televize* 29 (1993): 3.

²³³ Miloš Bárta, “Česká soda,” *Cinema* 25, no. 7 (2015): 53.

²³⁴ Ivo Mathé in *Mladá fronta Dnes*, August 13, 1993, in “Napsali o televizi,” *Týdeník televize* 37 (1993): 3.

The fifth episode was broadcast on August 28, 1993. And then *Czech Soda* continued as if none of this happened for several more years. The feature film *Czech Soda* was released in 1998 and became the second most visited Czech film of that year in the Czech Republic.²³⁵ By that time, Fenič already departed from *Czech Soda* and the programme continued to run under the changed name with Čtvrtníček, Šteindler and Vávra being solely in charge and with CT replacing *FEBIO* and becoming the *Czech Soda* producer. It was CT producer Čestmír Kopecký who talked Fenič into making the *Czech Soda* feature film. The CT unit of Čestmír Kopecký became the producer while the former *Czech Soda* producer Fenič edited the sketches from all of the episodes to make up for the film. He decided to run a survey among the public so that popular vote decided about what was to be included. Thus, the feature film consisted of those sketches which resonated the most among the *Czech Soda* audiences who took part in the survey.²³⁶

Besides *FEBIO* and CT, the popular tabloid journal *Blesk* (Lightning) sponsored the episodes. The 1994—1997 episodes were also sponsored by other commercial subjects. After Fenič abandoned the project, Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, and Vávra made nine more episodes. It meant that instead of withdrawing from the project, CT even continued on its own. Reflecting on how this was possible, Čestmír Kopecký concluded: “we had to fight for every single sketch. I cannot imagine this would get through today. [...] But back then, it also was like not possible.”²³⁷ According to Kopecký, constraints and tensions continued but then *Czech Soda* could be

²³⁵ “Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1998,” Česká televize, 52:02, premiered March 1, 2011, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10267861763-rozmarna-lea-ceskeho-filmu-1998/21056226509/video/>.

²³⁶ Author not specified, “Česká soda,” *Filmový přehled* 3 (1998): 9.

²³⁷ Čestmír Kopecký in “Rozmarná léta českého filmu - 1998.”

broadcast without any intervention from the management or RRTV members. The way CT tackled the controversies was that it shifted *Czech Soda* to less prominent time slots. *Czech Soda* also moved from CT1 to CT2 which implied that from nationwide test of democracy, it became a programme serving minority tastes and interests.

“If we were to do it again and in the same way today, absolutely nobody would let it get broadcast. The freedom we had in the wild nineties, this freedom is gone,” recalled Čtvrtníček when asked about *Czech Soda* on December 31, 2018.²³⁸ However, it was the tension within the creative team of *Czech Soda* which caused its end on CT. As it continued in the altered version under the title *Čtvrtníček, Šteindler, a Vávra uvádějí*, the decision to stop the programme, rather than being an outcome of institutional pressures, was made by Čtvrtníček and his colleagues. *Czech Soda* was a temporary enterprise, bounded by the “wild nineties.”²³⁹

4.3.2. “We Are Sorry to Interfere in the TV Commercial Programme”

Since the first episode, *Czech Soda*’s format parodied TV broadcasting as such. It therefore imitated the programme flow of CT and each episode included several programme sketches—news, commercials, debate programmes, language course, and later also entertainment formats. TV news formed a part of each *Czech Soda*’s episode and framed the transitions between the sketches. In most cases, TV news came after the *Also Sprach Zarathustra* theme song and usually it flashed throughout the episode to mediate the transitions.

²³⁸ Kateřina Chvátalová, “Česká soda by dnes byla nevysílatelná. Chybí svoboda a otevřenost, říká Petr Čtvrtníček,” Český rozhlas, December 31, 2018, accessed May 30, 2019, https://www.irozhlas.cz/kultura/ceska-soda-dnes-by-la-nevysilateln-a-chybi-svoboda-a-otevrenost-rika-petr_1812311846_cen.

²³⁹ Ibid.

In the first episodes, there was one news presenter and his secretary, their studio being in the open field. Čtvrtníček was their on-the-spot reporter. The first *Czech Soda* news showed the national banner with the motto “The Truth Prevails” and then transmitted the above-mentioned scene in which Václav Havel’s advertised the bottle full of sparkle. The reports which followed had a wide thematic span which corresponded with the focus of CT news. Moreover, not only the thematic but also the audio-visual correspondence came into play since some CT news reports were used and edited in the collage-like manner with *Czech Soda* sketches.

The parody was usually established through editing and adding fake scenes into the news report so that the viewer would take a hint of the original meaning while seeing it mocked through editing. The joke arose from the juxtaposition of the original context with how it was appropriated and reconstituted. In the second episode, Čtvrtníček, as a reporter, asks a Premonstratensian Prior about where people would be able to meet God during holidays. In the following shot, the Prior responds that these places are “forests, courtyards, and buildings.” The reporter is amazed: “Even in the buildings! Looking forward to seeing it.” To the viewer back then, it is perfectly clear that the original interview with the Prior dealt with the issue of Church restitutions. By editing the dialogue to be about the spiritual quest and meeting with God, the ridicule was very subtle. It positioned the materially oriented discourse as normal, serious while the shift towards spiritual dimension was employed as a mockery. In this way, it questioned the normalcy of what was presented as normal in the media discourse. Another example of this is the news about Mrs. Dagmar, the second wife of President Havel. The TV crew recorded exclusive material in the Presidential residence showing the first lady “half-naked, half-sitting, half-lying

on some sort of mattress.”²⁴⁰ An erotic scene follows which is an earlier film excerpt starring a famous actress Dagmar Veškrnová who only later married Havel and became the first lady. What is alluded to here, is the schizophrenic way in which media were treating Dagmar Havlová/Veškrnová. Only seldom went the actress and the first lady hand in hand which contrasted with how the President was still seen as a playwright and dissident. The impossibility to reconcile the two occupations of Dagmar probably had to do with her former occupation to be associated with naive and obscene characters of her roles, hence the erotic scene in the *Czech Soda* news.



Figure 6. Petr Čtvrtníček alias TV news presenter in the sixteenth episode of *Czech Soda*. He informs about the exclusive shots which show the first lady half-naked. *Czech Soda*, CT, August 6, 1997. Screenshot from YouTube.

As these two cases show, the key to understanding the jokes was general knowledge and keeping a track of what was going on. Both counted on the viewer to belong to the discursive community familiarised through cultural knowledge and media. This was even truer for the sketches which

²⁴⁰ “Česká soda 16 (celý díl),” YouTube, 17:28, premiered on CT August 6, 1997, published on YouTube April 30, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmyquaFKzzU&t=111s>.

engaged in the semantic play. Whereas sometimes the gag went beyond the situated knowledge (“A slaughterhouse sues pigs for neglecting hygienic norms.”),²⁴¹ the majority of semantic gags were greatly contingent either on the meaning-making within the Czech language or on familiarity with the historical, political and pop cultural context. To account for these nuances here is a difficult task but let me elaborate on two examples which I believe are representative. One comments on the process of post-socialist transformation and the other employs an ironical perspective on two countervailing historical traumas.

Only in the fifth episode did the news coverage transcend the national borders to report about Paris. It was a big deal for the reporters since they experienced difficulties to accept that “beyond the borders of our state there are other countries.”²⁴² The reporter visited the Pan-European Bank in Paris: “The Bank was built for aiding the poor Eastern European countries. The magnificent building of the Bank cost six hundred million francs and it operates its own ecosystem and microclimate. It is made of 15 hectares of glass windows and the desks are made of mahogany. We are near to tears. Jan Bubílek, Czech Soda, Paris.”²⁴³ The reporter was shown in an ill-fitting suit, walking through the interior of the Bank with pride and admiration. Not only did he wear the ill-fitting suit but he as a person seemed strikingly incompatible with the light and splendid interior of the Bank. His exaggerated enthusiasm had an alienating effect in that it exposed the failing of the self-colonisation endeavour of “Eastern Europe” to become “the West” as well as the actual self-regard of “the West” whose aid turned into a self-celebratory, and

²⁴¹ “Česká soda 1.díl,” YouTube, 10:02, premiered on CT June 4, 1993, published on YouTube October 31, 2009, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKU7CkzTFfM&t=46s>.

²⁴² “Česká soda 5 (celý díl),” YouTube, 16:02, premiered on CT August 28, 1993, published in YouTube April 27, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt3JF8bVFbM>.

²⁴³ Ibid.

eventually money-making project. The exposition was subliminal and yet striking, playing out as a performance of a keen self-colonisatory effort juxtaposed with the Western potentially lucrative altruism.

The other example is the news about the discovery of Špindler's list in the Špindlerův Mlýn town: "A list has been discovered in the ski resort of Špindlerův Mlýn. It is the list of 1200 Germans saved by the Czech entrepreneur of Jewish origin, Josef Špindler, towards the end of the Second World War. To express their gratitude, the Germans planted a dwarf mountain pine in Nuremberg to commemorate the rescue act of Špindler who unearthed them from beneath the avalanche."²⁴⁴ The reference here is not only historical but also reflects the pop cultural context. The Špindler's list alluded to the 1993 film *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg and it uses the contrast employed in the film, though in reverse terms. Whereas in the film the German entrepreneur and NSDAP member Oskar Schindler saves 1100 Jews, the report informs about the 1200 Germans rescued by a Czech Jew Špindler. Besides differing rescue numbers, however, the report plays with other nuances which relate to the early post-war Czechoslovak context as well as to the symbolic role of Nuremberg. Firstly, the Špindlerův Mlýn town was part of the area which was claimed by Adolf Hitler and incorporated into the Third Reich after the signing of the Munich Agreement. It was part of the borderland area where the majority population identified as German and which in the postwar years became the site of mass expulsion and resettlements based on ethnic criteria. Given that most of the Germans were forced to leave the area, it becomes clear why the commemoration of Špindler's rescue act took place in Nuremberg and not in Špindlerův Mlýn.

²⁴⁴ "Česká soda 9 (celý díl)," YouTube, 19:19, premiered on CT June 10, 1994, published on YouTube April 27, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-CoSxat0Cs&t=175s>.

The making of Germans into victims rescued by Czechs and Jews, and thus the destabilisation of the victimhood narrative, needs to be seen as responding to the particular context of coming to terms with the past which was characteristic of post-socialist development. The 1990s saw an opening of the discussion about the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia in the immediate postwar years. The debate was rather incidentally launched by Havel who apologised for the violence accompanying the expulsion when visiting Munich in 1990. The apology came unexpectedly and surprised both the German and Czech side. Havel's act of apology stemmed from his following of the underground debate led by the historian Ján Mlynárik who questioned the mainstream assertion that the expulsion was the accomplishment of historical justice.²⁴⁵

On this particular issue, Havel was far from instigating a revision which would result in the new post-socialist consensus and instead had to face a backlash. Thus, while Havel's view on the four decades of state socialism was met with a significant popular acceptance and found its way into officialised narratives,²⁴⁶ his criticism of expulsion stood for one of the main points of contestation throughout his political career. The disinclination of a wide segment of the public towards revisiting the expulsion yet somehow had to comply with the other hegemonic notion of Germany accounting for "the West." This image of the Western neighbour was double-edged. On

²⁴⁵ Ivan Štern, "Sudetští Němci a pochybný politický kapitál," Český rozhlas 6, January 23, 2013, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.rozhlas.cz/cro6/komentare/_zprava/ivan-stern-sudetsti-nemci-a-pochybny-politicky-kapital--1165762.

²⁴⁶ See for example the school textbooks or didactic documentary production.

the one hand, there were vengeful, domineering Sudeten-Germans,²⁴⁷ and on the other hand, there were hard-working, solid, Western partners. The fear of revision and the strong anti-Sudeten German sentiment coexisted with the emergent context of Germany becoming the major trading partner and the primary liaison between the Western and Central Europe. That the semantic division of these two images did not in fact function well and that many ambiguities kept complicating the image was shown by Petra Hanáková in her study about the representation of Sudeten Germans in Czech post-socialist cinema.²⁴⁸ In *Czech Soda*, the image of these two stereotypes intermingled which was epitomised by two Sudeten Germans Karl (Milan Šteindler) and Egon (David Vávra) starring in *Czech Soda* commercials on German products²⁴⁹ and investment funds.²⁵⁰

Coming back to the 1200 Germans rescued by Josef Špindler, the ambiguity does not directly concern the loaded category of being German but rather the discursive jungle of multiple sides claiming victimhood in the situation in which there also were many perpetrators. Without

²⁴⁷ The typical representation of the Sudeten-German character, with whom nearly everyone in the Czech Republic is familiar, is Trautenberk from the famous *Večerníček* fairy tale TV series *Krkonošské pohádky* (Fairy Tales of Krkonoše Mountains). See “Krkonošské pohádky - Trautenberk (sestřih),” YouTube, 4:52, February 23, 2008, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWxaql3_QtI.

²⁴⁸ Petra Hanáková, “‘I’m at Home Here’: Sudeten Germans in Czech Postcommunist Cinema,” in *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema: Portraying Neighbours on Screen*, ed. Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen, and Eva Naripea (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 91—110.

²⁴⁹ See the sequence 15:48—17:30 of the 12th episode of *Czech Soda* advertising “Schoda Henlein”: “česká soda,” YouTube, 28:46, premiered on CT December 31, 1994, published on YouTube November 11, 2011, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oR6O0FQKoXc&t=348s>. The brand Henlein referred to a leading Nazi politician Konrad Henlein. He was the Reichsstatthalter of the Sudetenland between 1939—1945.

²⁵⁰ See Karl and Egon promoting the investment funds “Sudety” and “Germany” in front of the CT headquarters: sequence 2:39—3:21 in “Česká soda 7 (Celý díl),” YouTube, 16:05, premiered on CT February 14, 1994, published on YouTube April 27, 2014, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMV2TSAGRVY>.

having to address the perpetrators at all, the story of the Špindler's list did an excellent job in providing each side with a congruous, nonconflicting memory. Except that it was a parody.

4.3.3. The Bat Reflects on Sensitive Issues

In the early post-socialist years, there were many programmes which engaged in debating current issues and usually including members of government, other high profile politicians, and various experts. Among them, the formats of *Debata* and *Klub Netopýr* (Bat Club)²⁵¹ were taken over by *Czech Soda*. Looking at the thematic scope of *Czech Soda* debates, most prominent were the issues identity and contested historical legacies. The content of the debate was not always important. Often, the gag was in the wordplays or in the way the original scenes were re-edited and rendered new meanings.

The discussion session of *Czech Soda* remake *Klub Netopýr* was dedicated to “the Sudeten German Question.”²⁵² The original version, hosted by Antonín Přikryl, was re-edited in a way which turned Přikryl into one of the invited guests and Petr Čtvrtníček into the host. Besides, there were two new guests taking part in the debate, the Sudeten Germans Karl and Egon. After all the guests are introduced Karl asked what does *Netopýr* mean and Egon explained to Karl that *Netopýr* is a sort of small bird. His explanation was met with objections, Pavel Tigrid's being the most resolute: “I don't think the viewers would buy this. Me neither. [...] I have to emphasise it because this *Netopýr* is very important—” He was interrupted by

²⁵¹ See the original programme: “Klub Netopýr: Případ Larryho Flynta,” Česká televize 1:00:59, premiered 1997, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1038840273-klub-netopyr/39735919104/>.

²⁵² See the sketch: “Česká soda 13 - Klub Netopýr,” YouTube, 2:28, premiered on CT July 13, 1995, published on YouTube April 29, 2014, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zB1ASZDj7Gc&list=PLvRmZxE0BEQdiQUBGZHZRhAnRUL0HdJ2D&index=12>.

Netopýr, a bat, being handed over to the host Čtvrtníček by the studio crew. The debate never landed on the Sudeten German Question despite two Sudeten Germans being present in the studio. Instead, some empty talking and lenient smiles followed while Karl and Egon played with bats.



Figures 7 & 8. Petr Čtvrtníček and Karl with bats starring in the Klub Netopýr programme. *Czech Soda*, CT, July 8, 1995, Screenshots from Youtube.

Another delicate issue was debated in the programme aptly titled *Debata*. The debate was preceded by the showing of archival film of the Anti-Charter Rally in the National Theatre in Prague. The Anti-Charter Rally was an event organised by the regime to fight the initiative Charter 77 by showcasing thousands of Czechoslovak artists standing up for the regime and

signing the pamphlet titled *Ztroskotanci a samozvanci* (Losers and Self-Proclaimed).²⁵³ Yet, the authentic record of the rally was re-edited with footage of Václav Havel, Milan Uhde, Jiří Dienstbier and Pavel Tigrid sitting in the audience boxes of the National Theatre. These men were eminent dissidents, most of them signatories of the Charter 77, which means that the Anti-Charter Rally was convened against them. Now they were invited to *Czech Soda* studio to justify themselves. In *Debata*, Tigrid and Dienstbier are confronted with the “incriminating” record and their reaction is astonishing. The interview is dynamically montaged and Čtvrtníček intervenes almost in every sentence to compose and maintain the sketch about Chartists being in fact the anti-Chartists.

Dienstbier: I need to remind you that there were tens of thousands people who were willing to—

Čtvrtníček: Come on, don't hide yourself there, you simply took the pen and signed the pamphlet.

Dienstbier: Yeah, I know... I was eight back then.

Tigrid: We were young lads and when we got the text—

Čtvrtníček: You just signed it.

Tigrid: Of course!

Čtvrtníček: Can you imagine what would say to you those thousands of people who suffered in Jáchymov camp?²⁵⁴

Tigrid: Those people were ten years in Jáchymov, while I left for Switzerland.

Čtvrtníček: How can you even put it this way?

²⁵³ Among approximately 7 thousand the signatories was also Věra Chytilová. She did not take part in the rally but was convinced to do so as she was finishing her film in *Krátký film* Studios. If she did not sign, her film 1976 *Hra o jablko* (The Apple Game) would be banned. Her colleague Kristina Vlachová refused to sign and as a consequence had to leave the profession. Author not specified, “Herci a spol. šli do Národního. Na hanbu,” *aktuálně.cz*, January 28, 2007, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/herci-a-spol-sli-do-narodniho-na-hanbu/r~i:article:340693/>.

²⁵⁴ In the 1950s, there used to be a labour camp in Jáchymov in which political prisoners extracted uranium ore.

Tigrid: I am a good communist, I am a pro-reform communist.

Čtvrtníček: Are you sure?

Tigrid: Absolutely sure! I come from Moscow.

Dienstbier: I am Stalin.

Čtvrtníček: Pardon me?

Dienstbier: I am Stalin, I suppose.²⁵⁵

Seemingly absurd, each of the lines was in fact referring to the talked-over affairs and to what stood for the common knowledge among the regular TV viewers. The first few lines mirrored the frequent debates thematising the compromising records from the state-socialist era, such as Cibulka's lists of police informers or the notorious Anti-Charter signatories. Many of those whose names appeared on the lists kept negating their involvement²⁵⁶ or found ways to justify their past decisions.

These tropes of negation, justification, or repentance which frequently emerged in the post-socialist TV debates were observed by Gil Eyal who considered them “rituals of confession.”²⁵⁷ Eyal noted that in “the Czech Republic, the process of capitalist reconstruction went hand-in-hand with the drive, led by former dissidents Václav Benda and Daniel Kroupa, to reveal the names of former secret police agents, and screen state officials with regard to their past. The legislation was probably the most vengeful among the Central European countries, in

²⁵⁵ See the sequence 4:24—6:29 in “Česká soda 14 (celý díl),” YouTube, 15:38, premiered on CT November 18, 1995, published on YouTube April 29, 2014, accessed June 1, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10FdSFJ7hkw>.

²⁵⁶ After Dagmar Veškrnová married Václav Havel, the information came out that she belonged among the Anti-Charter signatories. However, in the interview with Michael Žantovský she confessed that she did not remember signing this document. Michael Žantovský, *Havel* (Prague: Argo, 2014), 481.

²⁵⁷ Eyal, “Antipolitics”: 56.

terms of barring former communists from public office.”²⁵⁸ While Eyal points to the state administration and political sector, an analogue process was taking place in the cultural sphere with regard to the Anti-Charter. However, besides moral judgement, no consequences were driven neither from participating in Anti-Charter nor from other concessions. The stars of “normalisation” pop-culture thus maintained their positions of glory.

The first lines of Čtvrtníček, Dienstbier and Tigrid interact with several referential frames, the main one being the contrast established through depicting the dissidents as being part of the conformist majority. Via the juxtaposition of Charter (Havel, Uhde, Dienstbier) and Anti-Charter signatories on TV, the dissonance comes to the fore by referring to the co-existence of the Charter and Anti-Charter signatories in the post-socialist public sphere despite the strong moral credit of the former being in the opposition to the latter. Showing the Chartists as Anti-Chartists was indeed scandalous but also hinted at the weird post-socialist situations in which these opposite camps found themselves at one stage.²⁵⁹ The line “there were tens of thousands people who were willing to—” furthermore points to the paradoxical legitimacy of dissident politicians who stood for a tiny minority and yet were elected by the “silent” majority which most probably signed neither of those documents but revered both the dissident heroes of Charter and the artists and stars of Anti-Charter.

The rest of the debate touches on the moral hierarchies employed to differentiate between members of the same group while referring to the tensions between the émigré dissidents and

²⁵⁸ Eyal, “Antipolitics”: 56.

²⁵⁹ A telling example is the demonstration in December 4, 1989 when the singer-songwriter Karel Kryl and the pop-star Karel Gott together sang the national anthem from the balcony to the crowd of tens of thousands people. Jiří Černý, “Karel Kryl byl první velká osobnost sólového českého folku,” *aktualne.cz*, April 12, 2019, accessed June 1, 2019.

those who stayed in Czechoslovakia on the one hand and between the pro-reform Communists and hard-core conservatives on the other. While Tigríd never sympathised with the communist programme and left Czechoslovakia even before the communists took over, Dienstbier's biography was a typical example of "osmašedesátník" (the sixty-eighters).²⁶⁰ He joined the Party in the late 1950s and worked as a correspondent for Czechoslovak Radio. During the invasion in August, 1968, he defended the Radio against the occupying troops. In 1970, Dienstbier was fired from the Radio and expelled from the Communist Party. He then became a core member of Charter 77.²⁶¹

Tigríd did not sign the Charter 77 since he spent the four decades in exile where he, among other things, worked for Radio Free Europe and published exile quarterly *Svědectví* (Testimony). The line "those people were ten years in Jáchymov, while I left for Switzerland" refers to the tensions and divisions existing among dissidents which, far from being a monolithic group, quarrelled both over the interpretations of the state-socialist legacy and the moral credit of respective dissident groups. While Tigríd's stand was anti-communist throughout his life similarly to those who left Czechoslovakia in the postwar years, Dienstbier represented a more complicated political trajectory typical of many intellectuals of his generation. In a way, Tigríd and Dienstbier, having the same status of dissidents and sitting next to each other on the sofa, epitomised the incongruity of the anti-regime opposition, namely the fact that the opposition

²⁶⁰ Petr Pithart elaborates on the differences and common denominators within Czechoslovak dissent. Petr Pithart, "Devětaosmdesátý: Proti společnému ohrožení," *Listy* 3 (2009), accessed June 2, 2019, <http://www.listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=093&clanek=030904>.

²⁶¹ Josef Kopecký, Lenka Veselá, "První polistopadový ministr zahraničí Jiří Dienstbier zemřel," *iDnes.cz*, January 8, 2011, accessed June 2, 2019, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/prvni-polistopadovy-ministr-zahranici-jiri-dienstbier-zemrel.A110108_150309_domaci_jav.

consisted of 1948 anticommunist émigrés, of the domestic anticommunist resistance sometimes called “the third resistance,” and at the same time of the *sixtyeighters* whose pro-reform communist orientation was in some cases preceded by the stalinist enthusiasm.²⁶²

The absurd lines about coming from Moscow and about being Stalin pronounced by the former anti-regime opposition thus refer to the historical circumstances which brought these former political opponents into the same boat. They furthermore point out the paradox of post-socialist public debates in which some former communists became the frontrunners of anti-communist discourse and considered dissent to be the main factor bringing the state-socialist regime to collapse. Without downplaying the offensive nature of the sketch, I would argue that it effectively brought to the fore the discrepancies within the dissident circles existing both before and after “the truth and love prevailed over lies and hatred.”²⁶³

In the eighth episode of *Czech Soda*,²⁶⁴ there is an excerpt from an interview with František Ringo Čech, one of the signatories of the Anti-Charter, who always has denied singing the document.²⁶⁵ In the interview, Čech (his surname translates as Czech) provided a dialectic characteristics of Czechs:

²⁶² Milan Kundera and Pavel Kohout represent this trajectory. From Stalinist writers, they developed into critical, pro-reform Communists in the 1960s, and into dissidents after the 1968 invasion. Kundera emigrated in 1975 and Kohout in 1978, after signing the Charter 77.

²⁶³ Havel’s anticipation of future framing the ethos of the “Velvet Revolution.”

²⁶⁴ See the excerpt 5:15—6:11 in “Česká soda 8 (celý díl),” Youtube, 20:05, premiered on CT March, 14, 1994, published on YouTube, April 27, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGUcfeB6bgI&t=368s>.

²⁶⁵ See the interview with František Ringo Čech on dvtv: “V ruce pero mám, ale antichartu jsem nepodepsal, zmizeli jsme, tvrdí Ringo Čech nad fotkou z Reduty” aktualne.cz, 21:57, premiered October 12, 2017, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/v-ruce-pero-mam-ale-antichartu-jsem-nepodepsal-zmizeli-jsme/r~8e573260ae9f11e7a8460025900fea04/>.

Slovaks say that we Czechs are so to say specific. We may not even want this. But we want to go to Sarajevo but somehow we don't go to Sarajevo. We invite [Salman] Rushdie but then we don't quite welcome him. See what a performance we give! So we were in Sarajevo as well as we weren't. We received Rushdie and yet we did not. [...] We as Czechs like peace. The peace comes from our souls but clashes with the geographic location of our state.

While this sequence was not edited, the commentary which followed was a voiceover inserted by *Czech Soda* crew. "This is a small Czech. The cerebral centre of caution is overgrown. The cerebral centre of envy is hypertrophied. The cerebral centre of national pride is rudimentary."



Figure 9. František Ringo Čech standing for a small Czech in the eighth episode of *Czech Soda*. *Czech Soda*, CT, March 14, 1994. Screenshot from YouTube.

František Ringo Čech characterised the Czech nation as being in love with peace while history was not favourable to them in this regard. The contradictory acts of going and not going to Sarajevo, inviting and not welcoming Salman Rushdie, account for the strategy of the nation

which prefers peace but needs to take on the responsibilities stemming from the unwanted situatedness of Czechs as historical subjects. Through the dialectics of making and unmaking the decisions, Čech could later claim not to sign the Anti-Charter even if he did.

Čech pointed to the inability of Czechs to take unambiguous stands with regard to state affairs, yet asserted that this was due to the inherent preference of peace to the moral dilemmas posed by history. Such an argument appears in a less lenient form in the anthropological study *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation* by Ladislav Holý²⁶⁶ as well as in the Radim Hladík's dissertation *The Screen of Laughter and Remembering*.²⁶⁷ The latter argues that the Czech national imagination had to do with “the specific tradition of humour,” which stood for the nationalist social activity employed against the outsiders in the form of semi-public transcript circulating among those who get the “inside joke.”²⁶⁸ The genre of comedy thus achieved a “peculiar status in Czech history [because] the genre itself already provides a kind of a mask—and Czech nationalist intellectuals have used the cloak of comedy to reach large audience despite the supervision by Austrian, German, or Communist-Party authorities.”²⁶⁹ I would argue that the strategy of employing comedy as means of creating the sense of national belonging in which jokes triggered the sense of cultural intimacy also influenced the representations communicating the notion of shared historical memory. Thus, the peace articulated by Čech needs to be seen as standing for the neutralisation of historical and political tumult through the joke operation which

²⁶⁶ Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁶⁷ Radim Hladík, “The Screen of Laughter and Remembering: Collective Memory and Representations of State Socialism in Czech Cinematograph,” (PhD Diss, Charles University, 2011), accessed June 2, 2019, <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/108396/>.

²⁶⁸ Hladík, “The Screen of Laughter,” 121.

²⁶⁹ Hladík, “The Screen of Laughter,” 123—124.

blurs the struggles and good and bad sides by invoking historical paradoxes and ambiguities. In other words, peace for the “little Czech” meant that truth and love prevails but maybe not that much. The peace stood for the inability to pursue truth and love without at the same time maintaining ironical distance towards it.

The notion of historical actions and political decisions taking place in some sort of absurdist comedy perhaps found a climactic expression in *Czech Soda* but it drew on broader reservoir of Czech cultural production. Absurdist or ironical distance disorienting both from ethical categories and pursuit of politics impacted not only the historical reflections but also the political stances and takes on current affairs. While Havel’s anti-politics was distanced from the politics of left-right political spectrum because it postulated a different set of orientation, *Czech Soda*’s reconsideration of politics neutralised its struggles into ironical wordplays or even silence. In the sixteenth episode’s *Debata*, Petr Čtvrtníček welcomed the Prime Minister Václav Klaus, Michael Žantovský (the leader of Civic Democratic Alliance), Miloš Zeman (the leader of Social Democrats), and Zeman’s friend Jaroslav Bašta in his studio.²⁷⁰ After a loud reassurance that things are all alright, Čtvrtníček noted: “Gentlemen, we did not come here to yell at each other today, it is rather the other way round. Let’s have a few minutes of debating idleness.” The conversation idly unwrapped:

Klaus: Oh, idleness, I am about to write this word down—

Čtvrtníček: Write that down but now: hush!

Bašta: I need to respond to this—

²⁷⁰ See the sequence 3:17—6:25 in “Česká soda 16 (celý díl),” YouTube, 17:28, premiered on CT August 6, 1997, published on YouTube April 30, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmyquaFKzzU&t=111s>.

Čtvrtníček: Mr. Bašta, don't spoil it, hush!

Žantovský: I didn't get the opportunity yet—

Bašta: Wait until it's over!

Čtvrtníček: Mr. Bašta, be good!

Čtvrtníček: Gentlemen... we are doing great.

[Zeman starts poking in Čtvrtníček's ear.]

Čtvrtníček: Come on, stop it.

[Bašta farts.]

Bašta: Apologies.

Čtvrtníček: Mr. Bašta, haven't you promised that you would not fart here?

Klaus: This is a lethal shake.

Bašta: No way!

Čtvrtníček: This was a lethal shake indeed what you performed here.

Bašta: I am sorry but I need to respond to you in the similar manner—

Čtvrtníček: You gotta be kidding me!

Bašta: Wait! I don't like to be interrupted! This in fact is the matter of style!

Čtvrtníček: I think it is the matter of food poisoning.

[...]

Zeman: And last but not least. Mr. Prime Minister, you are a cow.

[Klaus notes the word down.]

Čtvrtníček: Such a nice summary of today's talk. My dears, the debate reaches its end—

Bašta: I am sorry but I need to respond to you in the similar manner—

Čtvrtníček: You rather not, Mr. Bašta. Dear all, our time is fortunately over.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ The sequence 4:20—6:18 in “Česká soda 16 (celý díl),” YouTube, 17:28, premiered on CT August 6, 1997, published on YouTube April 30, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmyquaFKzzU&t=111s>.

To clarify, the format of *Czech Soda's Debata* consisted of authentic shots of Klaus, Žantovský, Zeman, and Bašta sitting in the CT studio in the original *Debata* programme. The *Czech Soda* version was a remake of this original version with Čtvrníček taking over as a host. The way the *Debata* was re-edited reflects *Czech Soda's* fondness for breaking and reassembling the conversation. In that reassembled debate, the politicians were made into puppets and the fools pulled the strings.

4.3.4. “Because the Filth is Ingrained”

“There are stains which cannot be cleaned without damaging the substance of the fabric.”²⁷²

Unlike the format of *Czech Soda* news and debate programmes, *Czech Soda* commercials were not edited by using the original commercial shots in combination with added, staged scenes, but instead the whole sketch was staged. Therefore, the joke operation did not result from the editing work but rather was based on imitating and mocking the styles and discursive strategies of advertising. Usually, the original commercial on which the parody was based remained blatant but there were cases in which the *Czech Soda* commercials kept only a catchphrase while the main motif was scripted by someone from *Czech Soda* crew. This section will touch upon both cases.

Let me begin with the commercial which did not advertise anything and instead came up with an unflattering charge. Three people occurring in the fields alluded to the commercial portrayal of happiness, freshness, and beauty of people who discovered the promoted product

²⁷² “Některé skvrny nelze vyčistit bez porušení podstaty látky.” Bohumil Hrabal cited in Václav Bělohradský, *Přirozený svět jako politický problém: eseje o člověku pozdní doby* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991), 16.

and finally felt satisfied. These three protagonists, though, not only got worried about something but also looked quite unattractive. One by one, each came up with a question which was answered by the voice over and the caption.

Person 1: How come that I am not being able to take off my shirt for a month?

Because the filth is ingrained!

Person 2: Why am I not able to wash my socks?

Because the filth is ingrained!!

Person 3: Why are my shorts dirty with eggs even if I apply reverse washing?

You Pigs!!!²⁷³

The questions were variations of the trope typical of washing powder commercials, addressing the problem of residual filth. While the allusion and parodying of this particular commercial genre directly suggests itself, I would argue that the subtext of the scene related to the post-socialist situation not only by addressing the overall commercialisation and transition to capitalism, but also by drawing affinity between the language of the commercial and the public discourse of dealing with the state-socialist past. In favour of my argument speaks the sheer obsession of *Czech Soda* satirists with the washing detergent products. In another such commercial, the affinity was more evident. To understand the wordplay behind the advertised product, one had to be familiar with contemporary politics.

The advertised product was a washing-up liquid called MečJar and referred the well-known brand Jar. The alteration of the name, though, included another reference because it sounded identically with the surname of Slovak Prime Minister and leader of the Movement for a

²⁷³ “Česká soda 3 - Proč ?,” YouTube, 0:25, premiered on CT July, 3, 1993, published on Youtube April 22, 2014, accessed June 2, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTZ-L-86QpY>.

Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HzDS), Vladimír Mečiar. Moreover the commercial followed after the scene which depicted the Czech Prime Minister Klaus and “the nameless Slovak Prime Minister” meeting at the railway station near Prague. The commercial unfolds in the kitchen where a father explains to his son: “Thanks to the new Mečiar I will get my register perfectly cleansed!”²⁷⁴ After the father applied the MečJar liquid on the sheaf of papers, the son expressed his astonishment: “Wonderful, the register is clean like a doctor!” The concluding voice over reminded of Klaus’ voice: “Bright New Mečiar! It cleanses completely and totally.”²⁷⁵

The father’s register stood for the register administered by the state-socialist state police (StB). The personal registers were files which kept a track of the collaboration or, as the case might have been, too, indicated the refusal or passivity of the person in question to inform on or against fellow citizens. Besides alluding to the post-socialist ethical programme of “lustration,”²⁷⁶ the consequence of which was preventing the former secret police agents from holding a public office, it also pointed to a specific case of purification. The purification, meaning the elimination of one’s personal files took place during the regime change and it is known that the records were manipulated between November 17 and December 8, 1989.²⁷⁷ What

²⁷⁴ See the sequence 4:22—5:05 in “Česká soda 1.díl,” YouTube, 10:02, premiered on CT June 4, 1993, published on YouTube October 31, 2009, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKU7CkzTFfM&t=430s>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Eyal, “Antipolitics”: 56.

²⁷⁷ Radek Dragoun, “Prosincové pálení svazků StB. Přeceňuje se, tolik škody nezpůsobilo, říká badatel,” *aktualne.cz*, December 23, 2018, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/prosincove-paleni-svazku-stb-precenuje-se-tolik-skody-nezpusilo/r~97f9fa82048e11e9a470ac1f6b220ee8/>; see also Jiří Suk, *Labyrintem revoluce: aktéři, zápletky a křížovatky jedné politické krize* (Prague: Prostor, 2003), 355—379.

happened during these days has since then become the subject of speculation while the screening process was a major element of legislative and political dealing with the past.²⁷⁸

On March 24, 1992, the front-page of *Mladá fronta Dnes* informed that the name Vladimír Mečiar appeared in the StB registers in Bratislava. It was stated that Mečiar operated under the code name “Doktor.”²⁷⁹ However, this exposure did not lead to Mečiar’s resignation and he stayed in the office until 1998.²⁸⁰ The commercial thus addressed the paradoxes of the post-socialist coming-to-terms with the state-socialist past in that it showed the circumventing of the discourse of purification. In this instance, the consequences were drawn in the sense that purification effort was directed towards cleansing the personal files rather than towards undertaking penance and retiring from public life. As the commercial shows, the “rituals of sacrifice, purification, and confession”²⁸¹ accompanied the post-socialist transformation in ambiguous terms since it incorporated the notion of speculation, bitterness, and irony. Rather than being pervasive rituals, as Eyal put it, the “lustrations” invoked the feeling of arbitrariness, disputability, and controversy. In other words, there were voices which continuously doubted that “lustrations” were going alright and that eventually things would get satisfactorily settled.

²⁷⁸ See Petr Blažek, “Transitions to Democracy and the “Lustration” Screening Process” in *Transformation: The Czech Experience* (Prague: People in Need, 2006), 173—180. Accessed online June 3, 2019, https://www.mzv.cz/file/582145/Anglicka_verze.pdf.

²⁷⁹ Ivo Slavík, “Vladimír Mečiar byl ‘Doktor’: Branně bezpečnostní výbor potvrdil výpovědi zveřejněné v Respektu a MF Dnes,” in *Mladá fronta Dnes* 71 (3), March 24, 1992: 1.

²⁸⁰ To this day, Mečiar’s involvement with secret police is a subject of dispute.

²⁸¹ Eyal, “Antipolitics”: 57.



Figure 10. A commercial which advertises MečJar—the detergent applicable to personal files in the State Police register. *Czech Soda*, CT, June 4, 1993. Screenshot from YouTube.

“Lustrations” and, broadly speaking, the process of coming to terms with historical guilt were not the only issue addressed by *Czech Soda* detergent commercials. Another reference was prominent in this regard, a reference addressing both the past and the present condition. In the ninth episode, immediately after the viewers are informed about the rescue of 1200 Germans by Josef Špindler, the news are interrupted by a scene in which a white mother washed a Roma child. A man in suit entered the bathroom and started a conversation:

Man in suit: How come that your child is not clean and white?

Mother: I have no idea.

Man in suit: Because you are using the ordinary washing powder! Have you ever tried *Aryan*?

Mother: No.

Man in suit: [Dramatic music in background.] Please try it!

[A white child emerges from the foam in place of the Roma child.]

Mother: Fantastic! My child is truly white!²⁸²

Aryan commercial was drawing on the template of *Ariel* washing powder. A German product, *Ariel* had been branded as a quality guarantee based on the German expertise.²⁸³ Such representative template was remoulded by *Czech Soda* to account for the persisting racism by using the Nazi terminology. The juxtaposition of the Nazi racial ideology and the channelling of German expertise into selling the detergent product again pointed to the negotiations between the regimes of memory and the new horizons characterising the post-socialist years. The co-existence of these frameworks indeed took place since the 1990s saw many attempts of re-assessing the traumas linked to the experience of war.²⁸⁴

Yet, I would argue that the racist charge of the sketch relates more specifically to the Czech racism towards Roma. The washing of the Roma child refers to the paternalist policies of assimilation and acculturation which situated Roma community into colonised subjects, objects of supervision, and recipients of paternalistic care. The failure of these policies to ensure the Roma community an equal status was often assessed as attesting to Roma “maladaptation” rather than to the real-existing discrimination and racism. The scene portraying a Roma child in a bathtub becoming white refers thus to the envisioned goal of the intolerant or racist majority—the goal of making the “Otherness” disappear altogether. It is first here, where the Germans come

²⁸² See the sequence 2:54—3:27 in “Česká soda 9 (celý díl),” YouTube, 19:19, premiered on CT June 10, 1994, published on YouTube April 27, 2014, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-CoSxat0Cs&t=208s>.

²⁸³ See “Ariel Werbung Ilona Christen 1994,” YouTube, 1:30, February 11, 2014, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vXLF28yxGM>.

²⁸⁴ I already mentioned Havel’s act of apology for the mass expulsion of Sudeten Germans.

into play. *Aryan*, the trusted, imported technology appeared as an effective means of “cleansing.”²⁸⁵

Some other advertised technologies, though, were Czech-Made. The Czech-Made brand had been advertised in the fifth episode as part of the news programme.²⁸⁶ The sketch comprised of the original shots of the Minister of Industry and Trade Vladimír Dlouhý explaining that the Czech-Made campaign “would neither save the Czech economy nor solve its main problems but it is aimed at breaking the mental block which people are still inclined to have.”²⁸⁷ The shot in which he was speaking was edited together with the coverage of the ongoing Yugoslav War. After Dlouhý finished his talk, an affirmative voice over added: “Czech-Made: Buy Czech products!”²⁸⁸ In this case, the logic of the juxtaposition of Dlouhý and the ravages of war seems clear-cut. Guns and warfare equipment have traditionally accounted for a significant portion of Czech export. *Czech Soda* decided to break the mental block, join the campaign, and use CT as a platform for advertising the guns. After all, they were Czech-Made. It thus not only overcame the mental block concerning the Czech products but also the scruples of being discreet about capitalising on warfare.

²⁸⁵ Only several months before this episode was broadcast, a group of skinheads had driven four young Roma men into Otava river and had prevented them from leaving the river. An eighteen-year-old Tibor Danihel had not survived the incident. During the court proceedings, the accused skinheads mocked Danihel’s mother in the courtroom. Danihel’s mother died five years after Danihel. She did not live to see the perpetrators condemned. Six years after Danihel’s death, the court finally reinterpreted the case and judged it as a murder and sentenced three skinheads to several years in prison. See Antonín Pelíšek, “Zemřel, protože byl Rom: Utopil se v Otavě, kam ho nahnali skinheadi,” *idnes.cz*, November 11, 2015, accessed June 3, 2019, https://www.idnes.cz/ceske-budejovice/zpravy/skinheadi-smrt-tibor-danihel-pisek-1993.A151031_2202336_budejovice-zpravy_mrl.

²⁸⁶ See the sequence 3:00—3:28 in “Česká soda 5,” YouTube, 15:15, premiered on CT August 28, 1993, published on YouTube February 3, 2013, accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYlmjdwsS8s&t=386s>.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*



Figure 11. “Buy Czech Products!” *Czech Soda*, CT, August, 18, 1993. Screenshot from YouTube.

4.3.5. Alles Gute!

The end of each *Czech Soda* episode was devoted to German language. *Alles Gute* was a TV language course hosted by the Sudeten Germans Karl and Egon who spoke both Czech and German. The course started with practicing thematic vocabulary and then went on to performing whole sentences. The latter part of the course took the form of a sketch which corresponded with the thematic scope of the given lecture. In most cases, the lectures engaged in the stereotypical assumptions about both Germans and Czechs. These stereotypes were projected onto the past or related to the contemporary intercultural exchange. Karl and Egon stood for the connecting piece between the two nations and therefore their performances often drew on the sites of mutual encounter. Being Sudeten Germans, though, defined them as being “in-betweeners” who understood both sides while neither side quite understood them. In a way, they represented

endemic species who became exoticised in the course of the twentieth century's history. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on two *Alles Gute* sketches representing such miscarried encounters.

In the fourth *Czech Soda* episode, Karl and Egon dealt not so much with Czech-German cultural (mis)representation and instead touched upon the divide between the former West and East Germany or, generally speaking, upon the Cold War divide. The sketch was about them visiting West Germany for the first time. While Karl told the story in German, Egon was translating sentence by sentence into Czech. As they were narrating the story, the setting changed and Karl and Egon were relocated to a West German supermarket. “Karl and Egon came to West Germany to look around. Everything is very interesting. It is new and foreign. It is good to have a look around on the trip. They want to discover it all, they are examining it all. They want to go home with presents.”²⁸⁹ The scene showed Karl and Egon in astonishment, looking around the West German supermarket. Soon they began to fill their pockets with the Western goods. After they packed their clothes, the supermarket personnel turned up and exclaimed in disbelief: “Why are you stealing here?” “We are not stealing. We are just taking a look,” was the response Karl and Egon gave.²⁹⁰

The sketch proposed a particular reading of the “East” finally encountering the “West.” It suggested that the freedom imagined to be geographically located in the West could have been signifying diverging associations, needs, and desires. Karl and Egon stood for those “Easterners” who preferred to interpret freedom in terms of variety of consumerist choices being within easy

²⁸⁹ See the sequence 9:59—12:35 in “Česká soda 4 (celý díl),” YouTube, 13:39, premiered on CT July, 31, 1993, published on YouTube April 22, 2014, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umKPdab0q5c>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

reach. For them, the widening horizons of consumerist choices and experiences might have been more important than other aspects of post-socialist freedom. Karl and Egon portraying awkward, poor, and overwhelmed tourists furthermore embodied the ambiguities stemming from the East and West being two unequal partners. Even though the theft might have been motivated by the sense of compensation or “catching up,” the supermarket personnel obviously could not read it this way. The notion that people could materially compensate for the “shortages” of the former regime was strongly represented in the post-socialist public discourse, especially after the victory of the Civic Democratic Party in 1992. Yet, the Party economists argued that such compensation of catching-up and the anticipated prosperity would come only after the period of “tightening of people’s belts.”²⁹¹ Thus, even though the wished for prosperity was no more hidden behind the Iron Curtain, it was still behind the vitrine—far more visible, nearly accessible, but not yet.



Figure 12. Egon (on the left) and Karl “looking around” the West German supermarket. *Czech Soda*, CT, July 31, 1993. Screenshot from Youtube.

²⁹¹ For more on post-socialist austerity measures see Martin Myant, *Vzestup a pád českého kapitalismu: Ekonomický vývoj České republiky od roku 1989* (Prague, Academia, 2013), 23—101.

In another episode of *Alles Gute*, Karl and Egon tackled the delicacy of material compensation and its eventual delay in a more fatal manner. The topic of the episode was about satisfaction for uncle Karl from Theresienstadt but the real lesson was about how to compensate the victims and at the same time save money.²⁹² As Karl and Egon began to practice whole sentences, they came to visit uncle Karl, an old man who greatly suffered during the war. They decided to compensate him for the war. However, Karl and Egon remained level-headed as they showcased the money.

Egon: We do not want to pay little. Neither can pay much, though...

Karl: Our budget is limited. And we need to provide everyone.

Egon: We need some time to think about it.

[Uncle Karl dies.]

Egon: Uncle Karl stopped breathing.

Karl: Uncle Karl did not live to get a due satisfaction. On the other hand, we saved up money.

Egon: And those of you who are still waiting, be patient.

Karl: The less of you remains, the more money you'll get.²⁹³

The scene referred to German “Entschädigungspolitik,” namely to its ambiguity and to the fact that it came rather late. For instance, the Czech citizens whom the Nazis deployed as forced labourers only got compensated between 2001 and 2006—by that time, however, many of those concerned were either dead or very old.²⁹⁴ The sketch in fact quite appositely anticipated the

²⁹² See the sequence 15:03—17:23 in “Česká soda 9 (celý díl),” YouTube, 19:19, premiered on CT June 10, 1994, published on YouTube April 27, 2014, accessed June 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-CoSxat0Cs&t=884s>.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ The description of the “Entschädigung” proceedings can be found on the webpage of *Deutsch-Tschechischer Zukunftsfonds* (German-Czech Fund of Future): “Entschädigung von Zwangsarbeitern,” accessed June 4, 2019, <http://www.fondbudoucnosti.cz/de/ns-opfer/entschadigung-von-zwangsarbeitern/>.

process of the redistribution of the compensation since there was a concrete sum appropriated by the German state to compensate deserving Czech citizens. The sum counted 423 million of German marks and it had been redistributed among 75, 769 claimants while the overall number of submitted applications was 110, 624.²⁹⁵ Soon after the procedures of compensation were finally set in motion, the newspaper *Mladá fronta Dnes* published an informative piece which provided directions to prospective applicants, pinpointing that “eligible applicants are those who were alive by February 16, 1999 and supported their claim with substantial evidence.”²⁹⁶ It described the compensation as being both material and a moral gesture, the latter being more significant. The specification followed concerning the “rounds of payouts” as well as who are those fulfilling the criteria. “The first in line were the prisoners of the concentration camps and those born before 1922 with a well based applications. Altogether ten thousand forced labourers got compensated. [...] In the subsequent rounds, the amount of compensation will be based on the labor conditions and the period in which the labour was served out. Therefore, the amount would not necessarily reach the maximum limits.”²⁹⁷

The rationalised nature of administering the compensations, carefully attending to categories of victimhood and suffering, and considering whether the applications are well-grounded or lack supporting evidence must have invoked a sense of bitterness to some of those who recalled their traumas and found out that these could now be exchanged for hard currency.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Jiří Janeček, “Jak si vyzvednout výplaty odškodnění?” idnes.cz, July 3, 2001, accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.idnes.cz/ekonomika/domaci/jak-si-vyzvednout-vyplaty-odskodneni.A_2001M154F05C.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

In some sense, the process of submitting the application could be seen as an advanced *Alles Gute* lesson.



Figure 13 & 14. Karl appropriating money to compensate old uncle Karl. *Czech Soda*, CT, June 10, 1994. Screenshots from YouTube.

* * *

The closing scenes of *Czech Soda* once again played Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Given *Czech Soda*'s engagement in allusions, it would not be exaggeration to take a step from Strauss' to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. For it is *Zarathustra*'s teaching which I believe best sums up the underlying sense of situated aesthetics and ethics of *Czech Soda* programmes: "His teaching and it alone has as its highest virtue truthfulness—in other words the opposite of the cowardice of the 'idealist' who takes flight from reality [...]—Am I understood?... The self-overcoming of morality out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite—me—this is what the name of *Zarathustra* means in my mouth."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89—90.

Czech Soda programmes were over the top. They overcame the scruples of what is now being called political correctness in the public discussion. Yet, this overcoming of scruples, as well as the questioning of positions of morality in the Czech post-socialist public sphere, was practiced by people who cherished the sense of truth. Their take on the truth, however, drew on the post-socialist and postmodern experience. They saw truth as roaming around, which is searched for and its expressions change every now and then. They saw it as unfixed and in dialectic relationship with the established genres of the public, commercial, and cultural representations. *Czech Soda* was an ironic commentary pointing out the ambiguities and discrepancies of the Czech post-socialist public sphere. Even though its contribution to the public sphere did not have to do with the rational, well-structured conduct,²⁹⁹ it should be considered a critical contribution to the Czech post-socialist democracy.

²⁹⁹ Here I refer to the theory of bourgeois public sphere by Habermas. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (London: Polity Press, 1992).

Conclusion

In 1998, Václav Klaus, the former Prime Minister and leader of the *Civic Democratic Platform*, was installed on Letná plain in Prague. A banner of significant size with Klaus' face on it was looming over Prague, being located on the exact same hill where a huge monument to J. V. Stalin had stood several decades previously. As the newspapers back then informed, the banner was torn down three times by vandals but the *Civic Democratic Platform* always repaired it and Klaus thus continued to occupy this symbolical site.³⁰⁰

One day, the banner was replaced by another banner. This time, Petr Čtvrtníček was depicted on the banner and the banner promoted the *Czech Soda* series on CT2. Commenting on this issue, a CT reporter noted: "Petr Čtvrtníček is proud that he's become the third man in a row posing with a moustache on this well-known place."³⁰¹ The reporter approached Čtvrtníček underneath the monument and Čtvrtníček explained to CT: "We simply did a teaser. Quite an ordinary teaser. We chose this place randomly. [...] The campaign was financed by pensioners and children below the age of 3."³⁰²

³⁰⁰ "Billboard s Klausem rozřezali vandalové," idnes.cz, November 9, 1998, accessed June 6, 2019, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/billboard-s-klaussem-rozrezali-vandalove.A_981109_010342_domaci_kub.

³⁰¹ See the TV news report: "Archiv ČT24: Co zažila Letná, Billboard Petra Čtvrtníčka," CT ivysilani.cz, April 4, 2015, accessed June 6, 2019, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10116288585-archiv-ct24/215411058210014/obsah/392409-billboard-petra-ctvrtnicka-1998>.

³⁰² Ibid.



Figures 15, 16 & 17. The transient monuments on the Letná Hill. J. V. Stalin (on the left), Václav Klaus (upper right) and Petr Čtvrtníček (bottom right). Source: <http://letenskaplan.webgarden.cz> (Fig. 15), CT24 (Fig. 16 & 17).

Čtvrtníček's symbolic intervention and his ironical interview on the CT news shows that *Czech Soda* was not delimited to one programme in television. In a way, it became politics, too. This thesis proposed the new approach by looking at the post-socialist public discourse and democratic practice through the prism of television. I attempted to demonstrate the critical and meta-critical role of television. Using the example of postmodern satirical genre which constituted part of the CT programme scheme in the early post-socialist years, I tried to show that public service television was not only informing, educating and entertaining, but also reflecting on the post-socialist condition in an unprecedented manner. The film *Don Gio* and the programmes *Studio Kroměříž* and *Czech Soda* pointed to the farcical elements and the

ambiguities of post-socialist public discourses and media representations. While the critique was directed outward to joke about or ironically comment on various aspects of the post-socialist condition, it was also ultimately engaged in unsettling the established sense of the television medium as such. Therefore, I consider these programmes to stand for meta-critical undertakings and for a democratic practice. The fact that these programmes ran on post-socialist public TV in my view suggests that through its programme CT reflected on its discursive position in the overall infrastructure of Czech public sphere.

By linking the satirical TV production with the broader context of institutional changes in film and television industry, I emphasised the social and institutional logic behind the media and artistic innovations. Furthermore, I mapped the situated aesthetics and ethics by approaching the programmes as originating from shifted organisational structures and drawing on the specific cultural milieu around Prague experimental theatre. The unconsolidated structure combined with the historically contingent considerations of the television's public service mission explain why laughter was different back then and why the genre cannot be simply reenacted on today's CT. However, there is one more reason why these shows would not happen today in the way they did in post-socialism. Back then, the subversive tactics of these shows aimed to expose the ambiguities and discrepancies of the perhaps realigned but still existing truth regimes as well as fixated genres of public and media discourse. Today, however, the notion of truth is more difficult to defend than to deconstruct. While farce continues to be the genre of democracy, we might need a different kind of satire—the satire which would guide us through the post-truth discursive condition.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Film and Television Productions

30 případů Majora Zemana [Thirty Cases of Major Zeman], directed by Jiří Sequens. 1974—1979, Czechoslovakia, CST.

...Aby si lidi všimli [...So that people can notice], directed by Vladislav Kvasnička. 1988, Czechoslovakia.

Amadeus, directed by Miloš Forman. 1984, USA.

1. *Benefiční ples 1993* [First beneficent ball 1993]. 1993, Prague, CT.

Cigárko [Cigarette], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Zdeněk Suchý. 1988, Prague.

Česká soda 1 [Czech Soda 1], directed by Václav Křístek, Igor Chaun, Fero Fenič, and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 2 [Czech Soda 2], directed by Václav Křístek, Igor Chaun, Milan Šteindler, and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 3 [Czech Soda 3], directed by Václav Křístek, Igor Chaun, Milan Šteindler, and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 4 [Czech Soda 4], directed by Václav Křístek, Igor Chaun, Milan Šteindler, and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 5 [Czech Soda 5], directed by Ján Sebechlebský, Milan Šteindler and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 6 - SILVESTR [Czech Soda 6 - New Year's Eve], directed by Jan Hřebejk, Ján Sebechlebský, Milan Šteindler and others. 1993, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 7 [Czech Soda 7], directed by Jan Hřebejk, Milan Šteindler, and others. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 8 [Czech Soda 8], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček, Milan Šteindler, and others. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 9 [Czech Soda 9], directed by Igor Chaun, Milan Šteindler, and Petr Čtvrtníček. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 10 (Czech Soda 10), directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 11 [Czech Soda 11], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 12 - SILVESTR [Czech Soda 12 - New Year's Eve], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1994, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 13 [Czech Soda 13], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1995, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 14 [Czech Soda 14], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1995, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 15 [Czech Soda 15], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1996, Prague, CT.

Česká soda 16 [Czech Soda 16], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Milan Šteindler. 1997, Prague, CT.

Česká soda [Czech Soda], directed by Fero Fenič. 1998, Prague, CT.

Debata [Debate]. 1993—1997, Prague, CT.

Don Gio, directed by Michal Caban and Šimon Caban. 1992, Prague, CT.

GEN [Gene], episodes running between 1993–1994, Prague, CT.

Hra o jablko [Game of the Apple], directed by Věra Chytilová. 1976, Czechoslovakia.

Kam spějeme: Meopta Hynčice [Where do we go: Meopta Hynčice], directed by A. Frydrych and J. Stehlík. 1968, Czechoslovakia, CST.

Klub Netopýr [The Bat Club]. 1990—1997, Prague, CST/CT.

Koliba, directed by Zuzana Piussi. 2009, Slovakia.

Kopytem sem, kopytem tam [A Hoof Here, a Hoof There], directed by Věra Chytilová. 1988, Czechoslovakia.

Krejča za branou [Krejča Behind the Gate], directed by Radim Procházka. 2006, Prague, CT.

Krkonošské pohádky [Fairy Tales of Krkonoše Mountains], directed by Věra Jordánová. 1974—1984, Czechoslovakia, CST.

Malé televizní sázení MATES [Small TV Betting]. 1967—1994, Czechoslovakia, CST/CT.

Mí Pražané mi rozumějí [The People of Prague Understand Me], directed by Věra Chytilová. 1991, Czechoslovakia.

Možná přijde i kouzelník [Maybe Even the Wizard Comes], directed by Zdeněk Podskalský, Alexej Nosek, and others. 1983—1991, Czechoslovakia, CST.

Neviditelná ruka trhu: privatizace Barrandova [The Invisible Hand of the Market: The Privatisation of Barrandov], directed by Martin Kohout. 2012, Czech Republic.

OKO: pohled na současnost [EYE: the Present View], 123 episodes. 1992—2000, Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic, CT.

Panelstory [Story from a Housing Estate], directed by Věra Chytilová. 1979, Czechoslovakia.

Pražská 5 [The Prague Five], directed by Tomáš Vorel. 1989, Czechoslovakia.

Problematika [Question], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Zdeněk Suchý. 1988, Prague.

Proč? [Why?], directed by Karel Smyczek. 1987, Czechoslovakia.

Příběhy slavných: Andělé tě hlídají [Stories about Famous People: Angels are Taking Care of You], directed by Olga Sommerová. 2000, Prague, CT.

Retro: hazard [Retro: Gambling], directed by Ivan Bareš. 2009, Czech Republic, CT.

Rozmarná léta českého filmu [The Capricious Years of Czech Cinema], 20 episodes, directed by Petr Vacher and Jan Stehlík. 2010, Prague, CT.

Ryby [Fish], directed by Petr Čtvrtníček and Zdeněk Suchý. 1988, Prague.

Spříznění volbou [Ellective Affinities], directed by Karel Vachek. 1968, Czechoslovakia.

Studio Kroměříž, 10 episodes, directed by Petr Lébl. 1992—1993, Prague, CST/CT.

Tam a zpět [There and Back], directed by Fero Fenič. 1981, Czechoslovakia.

Televarieté [TV Variety Show], directed by Pavel Háša. 1971—1998, Czechoslovakia, CST/CT.

Václav Bělohradský: nikdo neposlouchá [Václav Bělohradský: nobody listens], directed by Robert Sedláček. 2004, Czech Republic, CT.

Zvláštní bytosti [Strange Beings], directed by Fero Fenič. 1990, Czechoslovakia.

Archives and Online Databases

Archiv České televize (Czech Television Archive)

Česká divadelní encyklopedie (Czech Theatre Encyclopedia), http://encyklopedie.idu.cz/index.php/Hlavn%C3%AD_strana

ČT, iVysílání (CT e-broadcasting), <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/>

ČT, Z archivu (CT Online Archive), <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/tema/archiv/>

FEBIO, febio.cz

Fero Fenič, official webpage, http://www.ferofenic.cz/cz/text_fs.html

Periodicals

“2x10 nejsledovanějších.” *Týdeník televize* 27 (1993): 2.

“2x10 nejsledovanějších.” *Týdeník televize* 40 (1993): 2.

“Česká soda.” *Filmový přehled*, no. 3 (1998): 9.

“Don Gio.” *Filmový přehled*, no. 11 (1992): 9-10.

“Kultura svobody (Diskuze v rámci MFF Zlatá Praha).” *Film a doba* 4 (1991): 221–223.

“Napsali o televizi.” *Týdeník televize* 29 (1993): 3.

“Napsali o televizi.” *Týdeník televize* 32 (1993): 3.

“Napsali o televizi.” *Týdeník televize* 37 (1993): 3.

“OK 3 21:30 Carabine, [OK3 9.30 pm, Carabine, Programme Annotation for October 28, 1990]” *Týdeník Televize* 43 (1990): 21.

Bárta, Miloš. “Česká soda.” *Cinema* 25, no. 7 (2015): 53.

Bartušek, Michal. “Pražská 5.” *Kino* 15 (1989): 15.

Fifka, Gustav. “Česká Soda.” *Týdeník televize* 28 (1993): 2.

Hájek, Petr. “Mlýny.” *Reflex* 21 (1991), 15.

Janeček, Jiří. “Jak si vyzvednout výplaty odškodnění?” *idnes.cz*, July 3, 2001, accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.idnes.cz/ekonomika/domaci/jak-si-vyzvednout-vyplaty-odškodneni.A_2001M154F05C.

Kolář, Jan. “Hraje divadlo Sklep.” *Scéna* 11 (1991): 13.

Lukeš, Jan. “Kde je vše povoleno, nic nepřekvapí: S Václavem Havlem o českém filmu let šedesátých a devadesátých.” *Illuminace* 8, no. 1 (1996): 89—100.

Macek, Jiří. “Studio Kroměříž.” *Týdeník televize* 53/1 (1992—3): 25.

Mašek, Vojtěch. “Zpětný průlom do Studia Kroměříž.” *Cinepur* 17, no. 64 (2009): 42.

Matásková, Simona. “Ředitelský duel.” *Týdeník Televize* no. 26 (1994): 10—11.

Pavlovský, Pavel. “Satira tancem.” *Tvorba* 15, no. 25 (1984): 10.

Slavík, Ivo. “Vladimír Mečiar byl ‘Doktor’: Branně bezpečnostní výbor potvrdil výpovědi zveřejněné v Respektu a MF Dnes.” *Mladá fronta Dnes* 71 (3), March 24, 1992: 1.

Sorry: Prává Demokratická Legrace. The issues 1993—1995.

Škrob, Pavel. “Dohnat, co jsme zameškali.” *Týdeník Televize* 44 (1990): 3.

Trapek, Jiří. *Týdeník Televize* 25 (1993): 5.

Vedral, J. “Od módy k názoru.” *AmatSc* 22, no. 6 (1985): 8.

Zaoralová, Eva. “FEBIO a Fero Fenič: Z rozjetého vlaku se nedá vystoupit.” *Film a doba* 39 no. 2 (1993): 69.

Publications

Fero Fenič, ed. *Fenomén FEBIO*. Prague: Febiofest, 2008.

“Kodex České televize: zásady naplňování veřejné služby v oblasti televizního vysílání.” Prague: Česká televize, 2003, 1—46.

Pittermann, Jiří, Jitka Saturková, and Vít Šnábl, eds. *(Prvních) 10 let České televize*. Prague: Česká televize, 2002.

RRTV. “Zpráva o stavu vysílání o činnosti Rady České republiky pro rozhlasové a televizní vysílání.” Prague: Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, 1994.

Laws and Recommendations

Act on Czech Television, 483/1991 Coll.

Act on Radio and TV Broadcast 36/1993 Coll.

Parliamentary responsibility for the democratic reform of broadcasting. Recommendation 1147, Article 5. Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, Assembly debate on 22 April 1991 (1st Sitting).

The Media in a Democratic Society: Resolutions and Political Declaration: The Future of Public Service Broadcasting. 4th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, Council of Europe. Prague, December 7—8, 1994.

Secondary Sources

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Bednařík, Petr Jan Jirák and Barbara Köpplová. *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti*. Prague: Grada, 2011).

Bělohradský, Václav. *Kapitalismus a občanské ctnosti*. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992.

Bělohradský, Václav. *Přirozený svět jako politický problém: Eseje o člověku pozdní doby*. Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1991.

Bílek, Petr and Blanka Činátlová, eds. *Tesilová kavalerie: Popkulturní obrazy normalizace*. Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2010.

Bláhová, Jindřiška. “‘Before I fought ideology, not money’: Věra Chytilová and the 1990s transformation of Czech cinema culture.” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 10, no. 1 (2019), 39—54.

Blažek, Petr. “Transitions to Democracy and the “Lustration” Screening Process.” In *Transformation: The Czech Experience*, 173—180. Prague: People in Need, 2006.

Blažek Petr and Filip Pospíšil. *Vraťte nám vlasy!: první máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu*. Prague: Academia, 2010.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge, 1984.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Boyer, Dominic and Alexei Yurchak. "American Stioh: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveals about Contemporary Political Culture in the West." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010), 179—221.
- Boyer Dominic and Alexei Yurchak. "Postsocialist Studies, Cultures of Parody and American Stioh." *Anthropology News* 11 (2008), 9–10.
- Bren, Paulina. *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010.
- Buden, Boris. "Children of Postcommunism." *Radical Philosophy* 159 (Jan/Feb 2010). Accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/children-of-postcommunism>.
- Cysařová, Jarmila. "Padesát let televize. Dlouhá cesta k nezávislosti." *Listy* 3 (2003). Accessed June 4, 2019 <http://www.listy.cz/archiv.php?cislo=033&clanek=030304>.
- Eyal, Gil. "Anti-Politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism." *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 49—92.
- Fisher, Mark. *The Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2014.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Gjuričová, Adéla. *Rozdělení minulosti: vytváření politických identit v České republice po roce 1989*. Prague: Knihovna Václava Havla, 2011.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. London: Polity Press, 1992.
- Hanáková, Petra. "'I'm at Home Here': Sudeten Germans in Czech Postcommunist Cinema." In *Postcolonial Approaches to Eastern European Cinema: Portraying Neighbours on Screen*. Eds. Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen, and Eva Naripea, 91—110. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.
- Higgie, Rebecca. "Kynical dogs and cynical masters: Contemporary satire, politics and truth-telling." *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 27, no. 2 (2014), 183—201.
- Hladík, Radim. "The Screen of Laughter and Remembering: Collective Memory and Representations of State Socialism in Czech Cinematography." PhD Diss., Charles University, 2011,

- Holý, Ladislav. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Imre, Anikó. *Identity Games: Globalisation and the Transformation of Media Cultures in the New Europe*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Imre, Anikó, Timothy Havens, and Kati Lustyik. *Popular Television in Eastern Europe during and since Socialism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2013.
- Imre, Anikó. "The Witty Seven: Late Socialist-Capitalist Satire in Hungary." *Popular Communication* 10, no. 1—2 (2012), 131—144.
- Imre, Anikó. *TV Socialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Iordanova, Dina. *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film*. London: Wallflower, 2003.
- Iordanova, Dina. "East Europe's Cinema Industries Since 1989: Financing Structure and Studios." *Javnost - The Public* 6(2) (2014), 45—60.
- Jirák, Jan, Barbara Köpplová, and Denisa Kasl Kollmannová, eds. *Média dvacet let poté*. Prague: Portál, 2009.
- Just, Vladimír. "Divadlo—Pokus o vymezení." In *Alternativní kultura: příběh české společnosti 1945—1989*, ed. Josef Alan, 443—459. Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2001.
- Klumbyté, Neringa. "Political Intimacy: Power, Laughter, and Coexistence in Late Soviet Lithuania." *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 25, no. 4 (2011), 658—677.
- Kolář Pavel and Michal Pullmann. *Co byla normalizace? Studie o pozdním socialismu*. Prague: NLN&ÚSTR, 2016.
- Kopeček, Michal and Piotr Wciślik, eds. *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015.
- Kovář, Zdeněk. "The Five from Prague art companies 'before' and 'after:' Generation companies and their change of media presentation and reception in the changed historical context after November 89." Master Thesis, Charles University, 2012.
- Krumpár, Pavel. "Počátky duálního televizního vysílání v České republice." *Illuminace* 21, no. 2 (2009), 5—58.
- Lukeš, Jan. *Orgie střídmosti, aneb konec československé státní kinematografie*. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 1993.

- Macura, Vladimír. "Problems and paradoxes of national revival." In *Bohemia in History*, ed. Mikuláš Teich, 182—197. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Macura, Vladimír. *Šťastný věk: Symboly, emblémy a mýty 1948–89*. Prague: Pražská imaginace, 1992.
- Myant, Martin. *Vzestup a pád českého kapitalismu: Ekonomický vývoj České republiky od roku 1989*. Prague, Academia, 2013.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Hommo*. Translated by Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Pullmann, Michal. *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*. Prague: Scriptorium, 2011.
- Reifová, Irena. "A Study in the History of Meaning-Making: Watching Socialist Television Serials in the Former Czechoslovakia." *European Journal of Communication*, 30 , no. 1, 2015: 79–94.
- Reifová, Irena and Tereza Pavlíčková "Invisible Audiences: Structure and Agency in Post-socialist Media Studies." *Media Studies* 2 (2013), 130—136.
- Reifová, Irena. "Rerunning and "Rewatching" Socialist TV Drama Serials: Post-Socialist Czech Television Audiences Between Commodification and Reclaiming the Past." *Critical Studies of Television*, 4, no. 2, 2010, 53–71.
- Reifová, Irena. "Sons and Daughters of Jakob, the Glassworker: Dominant and Resistant Meanings in Television Popular Fiction after 1985." *Mediální Studia* 2, no. 4, 2007, 376–415.
- Roubal, Petr. *Československé spartakiády*. Prague: Academia, 2016.
- Sloterdijk, Peter. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. London: Verso, 1988.
- Szczepanik, Petr and Patrick Vonderau, eds. *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Szczepanik, Petr. "Between Units and Producers. Organisation of Creative Work in Czechoslovak State Cinema 1945–1990." In *Film Units: Restart*, edited by Marcin Adamczak, Piotr Marecki, and Marcin Malatyński, 273—311. Cracow: Ha!art, 2012.
- Szczepanik, Petr. "How Many Steps to the Shooting Script? A Political History of Screenwriting." *Illuminace* Vol 25(3) (2013), 73—98.
- Szczepanik, Petr. "Lights! Kamera! Azione! Practices, Sites and Careers in European Film Production." *Illuminace* 22, no. 4 (2010), 182—184.

Szczepanik, Petr. "On the Ethnography of Media Production: An Interview with Georgina Born." *Illuminace* 25, no. 3 (2013), 99—119.

Szczepanik, Petr. "Post-socialist Producer: The Production Culture of a Small-Nation Media Industry." *Critical Studies in Television*, Vol 13, no. 2 (2018), 207–226.

Szczepanik, Petr. "The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture." In *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures*, ed. Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau, 113—134. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Yurchak, Alexei. "The Cynical Reason of Late Socialism: Power, Pretence, and the Anekdot." *Public Culture* 9, no. 2 (1997), 161—188.

Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Žantovský, Michael, *Havel*. Prague: Argo, 2014.

Media Sources

aktualne.cz

Český rozhlas

Český rozhlas, Radio Wave

Divadelní noviny

Filmový přehled

idnes.cz

ihned.cz

www.listy.cz

louč.cz

Reflex

Respekt

Týden

YouTube