

*Projekty***A Tough Job for Donald Duck:
Czechoslovakia and Hollywood 1945–1969****The aim of the research**

The aim of this PhD dissertation is to examine the relationship between Czechoslovakia and American film industry from 1945 till 1969 in the broader context of the studies of Hollywood and Europe. These border years represent significant historical turns in both world and Czechoslovakian history and bracket this period as a coherent and legitimate era for research. I will examine developments in Hollywood's export strategies towards Eastern Bloc countries, changes in Czechoslovak cultural policy with regard to Hollywood imports and the role of Hollywood films in debates about Czechoslovak national identity. I situate the cultural and economic interaction between Hollywood and Czechoslovakia in the context of the emergence and escalation of the Cold War and the process of political liberalization in the Eastern Bloc. The cultural and political changes on both sides enable the exploration of the continuities and shifts in the relationship between Hollywood and Czechoslovakia. Yet, the period is not self-contained but opens up space for possible extension of the research to the 70s and 80s.

Hollywood's presence in Europe has always been a subject of a great interest for film historians, as well as scholars from other academic fields such as American or Cultural Studies. However, despite the escalating interest of the new historiography in this area, most of the research has been focused on the traditional Hollywood European markets such as Britain, France or Germany, while the whole region of the former Eastern Bloc countries has been largely neglected. Yet these countries have a rich history of interaction with both the American film industry and the U.S. government.

Concerning Czechoslovakia, the complexity and dynamics of this interaction can be glimpsed in the American media coverage of Hollywood's business in the post-war Czechoslovakia¹⁾ and in Petr Mareš's study *Politika a „pohyblivé obrázky“*.²⁾ Mareš's study reconstructs in great detail the negotiation process in 1945 and 1946 between Hollywood and Czechoslovakia regarding the return of the American films on the Czechoslovak screens. It is so far the only work in the Czech historiography that investigates the multilayered relationship between the American film industry and Czechoslovakia. The American periodicals and Mareš's work indicate the extensive potential of this area for further research, whether within the framework of Hollywood foreign

1) Among the most important sources are film trade magazine *Variety* and *The New York Times*. Since film industry's executive headquartered in New York City, the latter functioned in a sense as a "trade periodical" and provides significant information on film business activities. *New York Times* also had its own correspondent in Prague until 1951 and later on in the second half of the 50s.

2) Petr Mareš, *Politika a „pohyblivé obrázky“*. Spor o dovoz amerických filmů do Československa po druhé světové válce (Politics and "Moving Pictures": A Controversy over the Import of American Films into Czechoslovakia after WW II), *Illuminace*, Vol. 6, 1994, No. 1, pp. 77-96.

policy, the history of reception, Czechoslovak cultural policy or representational practices. My research therefore aspires to address this existing gap and thus integrate Czechoslovak historiography into the wider trends of the modern world film historiography. However, it does not claim to cover all the possible aspects outlined above but is focused on transnational history of cinema as a product of interaction between politics, economics and culture.

The historical background

After organizing themselves into the stabilized industrial system and challenging foreign film companies on the American market in the first decade of the 20th century, Hollywood film companies expanded overseas. Taking advantage of competitors weakened by WWI, the American film industry gradually developed into the dominant world film distributor, producer, and institution during the 20s and 30s. One of the results of this dominance was that Hollywood became increasingly dependent on world markets. The usual estimation is that Hollywood drew one third its overall revenues from abroad during the 30s. This so-called “dollar imperialism” was perceived by foreign governments, nationalists, and cultural elites as a threat to local film industries and national cultural identity alike. The debates about the cultural and national identity and the American cultural invasion echoed the traditional tension between the European high culture and the American popular non-culture.³⁾ The dramatic geopolitical shifts after WWII added political and ideological dimensions to the notion of the Americanization of Europe as well as to the Hollywood’s foreign policy. Organizing its business in post-war Europe, Hollywood divided the countries into two categories: countries where more or less normal trade could be resumed and the “troublemakers” that imposed import and financial restrictions. To deal with the troublemakers, 10 Hollywood studios associated in the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) formed an export agency in 1945 called the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA). Czechoslovakia qualified for the troublemaker category by nationalizing its film industry. But given its rather unique strategic position between East and West, the country’s importance for the U.S. foreign policy in the region, historical affinity towards “all things American,” and outstanding trade balance with Hollywood before the war,⁴⁾ I would argue that it was rather a prominent troublemaker.

Field overview

The relationship between Hollywood and Europe has been analyzed from various perspectives reflecting its twofold character: economical and cultural. The complexity of this relationship

3) For more on the Americanization of European culture see for example Victoria de Grazia, *Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920-1960. The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 61, 1989, No.1 (March), pp. 53-87. Andrew Hignson – Richard Maltby (eds.), “Film Europe” and “Film America”. *Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920-1939*. Exeter : University of Exeter Press 1999.

4) Rather than taking the size of the market alone as the single most important indicator, the cinema going habits of the population has to be taken into account when calculating profitability. Kristin Thompson offers as an example of a non-lucrative market France in 1925. See Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-1934*, London : BFI 1985, p. 126. According to this indicator American film industry regarded Czechoslovakia as one of the most lucrative interwar European markets. See for example If Russia Gets Trade Influence In Eastern Europe, That’s NG for U.S. Pix. *Variety*, Vol. 162, 1946, No.11 (22. 5.), p.7. Or Nazi Expansion Seen as Curb on U.S. Films. *New York Times*, 1939, 9. 4., p. 33.

is reflected in the continuous historical work and ongoing revisiting of the existing research. Such academic activity was and is primarily permitted by an access to new archival sources and reconsideration of the methodology and re-reading of data by “new film historians”⁵⁾. The pioneering work of the field is Thomas Guback’s *The International Film Industry: Western Europe and American since 1945*. Approaching the field from perspectives of the traditional historiography, Guback sets the overall big picture of the transatlantic film business enveloped in the classical narrative of the American hegemony. Guback’s work is later revisited by Ian Jarvie. One of the areas Jarvie addresses more thoroughly is the Hollywood’s economic foreign policy, before, during, and after WWII.⁶⁾ The liaison between the State Department and Hollywood and its implications in particular European markets are further analyzed by numerous other scholars.⁷⁾ Kristin Thompson’s book *Exporting Entertainment* investigates the American film export trade and distribution patterns up to 1934.

Similarly extensive is the academic work on cultural aspects of the American presence in Europe. Victoria de Grazia explores the American challenge to national cinemas, while Richard Maltby analyses the effects of Hollywood product on the British national and cultural identity. Ruth Vasey focuses on representation of ethnicity and nationality in Hollywood movies. Her most recent work investigates the way Hollywood’s representational practices and self-regulative narrative mechanisms were being shaped by the impulses from foreign audience and governments.⁸⁾

Chapter breakdown

In the first chapter I will focus on the main issues, debates, and questions regarding the relationship between Hollywood and Europe. In the second chapter, I will look at the Hollywood foreign policy towards Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1957 as executed through MPEA. (The MPEA’ license for Soviet satellites expired in 1957 when studios decided to negotiate individually.) The MPEA activities and strategic objectives will be analyzed in four overlapping contexts – the MPEA relationship to the Soviet satellites and the Soviet Union, the MPAA relationship to the State Department, the general U.S. foreign policy, and the MPAA domestic policy. In chapter

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- 5) An example of an innovative approach is the work of German historian Joseph Garnarz. Contrasting commercial success of American movies in Germany with market share data which are usually used as an indicator of the US dominance on the foreign markets, Garnarz challenges the oft-repeated story of the American dominance in Europe. Joseph Garnarz, *Hollywood in Germany. The role of American Films in Germany, 1925-1990*. In: David W. Ellwood – Rob Kroes (eds.), *Hollywood in Europe, Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*. Amsterdam: VU University Press 1994, pp. 94-117.
 - 6) Ian Jarvie, *Dollars and Ideology, Will Hay’s Economic Foreign Policy 1922-1945*. *Film History*, Vol. 4, 1990, pp. 277-288; See also: Ian Jarvie, *Free Trade as cultural threat: American film and TV exports in the post-war period*. In: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith – Steven Ricci (eds.), *Hollywood & Europe, Economics, Culture, National Identity: 1945-1995*, London : BFI 1998, pp. 34-46.
 - 7) David D. Ellwood – Rob Kroes (eds.), *Hollywood and Europe, Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*. Amsterdam : VU University Press 1994. Ellwood’s and Kroes’s anthology includes contributions from Thomas Elsaesser, Joseph Garnarz, Paul Swann, Ruth Vasey, Richard Maltby, David W. Ellwood, Fabrice Montebello...
 - 8) V. de Grazia, *Mass Culture and Sovereignty*; Richard Maltby, ‘D’ for Disgusting, American culture and English Criticism. In: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith – Steven Ricci (eds.), *Hollywood & Europe, Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95*. London : BFI 1998, pp.104-115; Ruth Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*. Exeter : University of Exeter Press 2005. Ruth Vasey, *Foreign Parts, Hollywood’s Global Distribution and the Representation of Ethnicity*. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 44, 1992, No. 4 (Dec.), pp.617-642, Special Issue: Hollywood, Censorship, and American Culture.

three, I will look at the discursive construction of Hollywood and the USA in communist propaganda and as an alternative counter-cultural space. In the last chapter, I will address Hollywood's position in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s by looking at the activities of the individual majors, changes in the Czechoslovak film industry, presence of other Western national cinemas, intentions of the U.S. government in the region, and finally the cultural exchange between the two countries in the era of the Czech New Wave.

Research sources

My historical and culturally critical research is primarily based on the archival work in both Czech and U.S. archives. The key Czech archives are the National Archive (Národní archiv) holding files of the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education, the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Film Archive (NFA), which holds the post-war files of the Czechoslovak State Film (Československý státní film) and Czechoslovak Filmexport (Československý Filmexport) as well as collections of important periodicals such as *Kino* or *Filmové a televizní noviny* which are essential for chapter on the discursive construction of Hollywood. The research at this point is complicated by the inaccessibility of the Czechoslovak State Film archive. Nevertheless the MPEA foreign policy and studios' activities and policies in the 60s can be at least partially reconstructed from other sources – American periodicals such as *Variety* and *The New York Times* and documents available in U.S. archives. However, the study would unquestionably benefit from access to mentioned Czech archives. In the USA, I want to primarily examine the records of the U.S. State Department at the National Archives in Washington, DC, with emphasis on its communication with the Czechoslovak government and Hollywood.

J i n d ř i š k a B l á h o v á

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