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“If not for their Artistic Merit then their Capacity to Connect with People”

*Czechoslovak Communists, Late Cold War Cultural Policy,
and Youth-oriented American Films*

Youth-oriented American imports such as *FIVE EASY PIECES* (US release: 1970/ Czechoslovak release: 1973), *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER* (1977/1979), and *FLASHDANCE* (1983/1989) were a prominent part of Czechoslovak culture during the late Cold War period.²⁾ In the 1970s and 1980s, the State Film Company (CSF), via its distribution branch the Central Film Distributor (Ústřední půjčovna filmů, hereafter CFD),³⁾ targeted young people with domestic productions like *HOLKY Z PORCELÁNU* (Girls from a Porcelain Factory, 1975) and *DISCOPŘÍBĚH* (Disco Story, 1987), and those of other nations including West Germany (*ERSTE LIEBE*, 1970) and Poland (*TRZEBA ZABIĆ TĘ MIŁOŚĆ*, 1972/1979).⁴⁾ This Communist-controlled, vertically integrated organization's handling of such fare was governed by Party ideology and economic pragmatism. On the one hand,

1) The authors would like to thank the reviewers of this essay, the general editor of this journal, and its copy-editor for their valuable insights.

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2) It was not uncommon for some time to pass between a film's US and Czechoslovak releases. We need to appreciate that a number of factors, many of which were not ideological in nature, affected the timing of a film's purchase and release in Czechoslovakia. These included long-term distribution plans, the lower cost at which older films could be acquired, the willingness of a rights holder to lease a film for a lump sum as opposed to a share of the profits, and the thirty percent cap the Communist Party placed on the amount of films from capitalist countries in circulation at one time.

3) Reinvigorated academic interest in the working lives of media workers suggests new lines of enquiry which promise to shine a light on the decision-making behind the activities discussed in this paper. Such endeavor is welcomed but ultimately beyond the scope of this essay.

4) Robert Kolář, 'Rok 1973 v našich kinech. Hovoříme s ředitelem ÚPF Vladislavem Maškem', *Záběr*, 25 January 1973, pp. 3, 6; Zdenka Silanová, 'Ústřední půjčovna filmů uvádí...', *Kino*, 26 September 1973, p. 5; Ludvík Toman, 'Z referátu na mezinárodním sympoziu o působení filmu a televizi na společenské vědomí ve dnech 14.–18. ledna 1974', in Slavoj Ondroušek (ed.), *Za socialistické filmové umění (sborník dokumentů 1969–1974)* (Praha: Čs. filmový ústav, 1975), p. 153; Miroslava Knořlíčková, *Podíl filmu na šíření uměleckých a kulturních hodnot* (Praha: Ústav pro výzkum kultury, 1988), pp. 1–43.

the Czechoslovak Communist Party had commissioned the CSF to expose young people to pictures advancing socialist values. The CSF's promotion of Party policy was determined less by mandate, however, than by personnel politics, professionalism, naturalization, and self-censorship. This being said, the Party did ensure the CSF executed policy by employing trusted managers and by monitoring the marketing materials it produced.⁵⁾ On the other hand, the CSF deemed US imports particularly valuable because they were thought to attract the young people who dominated ticket sales at a time when attendance was generally declining.⁶⁾ The CFD estimated that 12–25 year-olds accounted for eighty percent of the tickets sold in Czechoslovakia, with 15–19 year-olds representing the most avid motion picture consumers. Naturally, it sought to retain this powerful audience.⁷⁾

The specific logic and strategies that underwrote the CFD's handling of its youth-oriented American imports across the final two decades of Communist rule are examined in this essay. From an analysis of cultural policy statements, press coverage, and promotional materials, we argue that the organization framed these films in four historically situated ways reflecting changes in cultural policy.⁸⁾ We begin by explaining that all of its approaches were rooted in an important series of social and political developments that unfolded in the late 1960s. From there, we detail how each approach was also informed by conditions characterizing the period in which it was widely adopted. From 1969 to 1970, the CFD used youth-oriented American imports to blame student protests on bad parenting. Then, across the early 1970s, this organization used counterculture films to critique various aspects of American capitalist democracy. It would appropriate musical movies in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a means of promoting anodyne alternatives to indigenous music subcultures associated with antiestablishment sentiments. And, finally, the late 1980s saw the CFD utilize another selection of musical movies to mitigate consumer dissatisfaction when public frustration was growing at the failings of the Czechoslovak economy.

By shedding new light on the CSF's investments in the cultural products of an "enemy state", this essay develops our understandings of how European elites appropriated youth-

5) The CFD typically commissioned its own promotional posters for imported films, and selected lobby cards from those provided by the rights holder. Marie Sylvestrová, 'Czech film posters since [sic] 1945 to the present', in *Czech Film Posters of the 20th Century* (Brno: Moravian Gallery and Prague: Exlibris, 2000), p. 56.

6) BK, 'Bosé nohy v parku', *Filmový přehled*, 10 October 1969; Aleš Danielis and Radko Hájek, 'Film a divák X, Nové světy', *Film a doba*, 1989, p. 556; For Czechoslovakia theater attendance figures see Ladislav Pištora, 'Filmoví návštěvníci a kina na území České republiky', *Illuminace*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1997), pp. 63–106.

7) Toman, 'Z referátu'; Knoflíčková, *Podíl filmu*, p. 12; Anon., 'Ústřední dramaturg filmového studia Barrandov Ludvík Toman bilancuje rok 1974 a hovoří o dramaturgickém plánu na rok 1975', *Zpravodaj čs. filmu*, 9 January 1975, p. 1; 'Závěry 1. schůze komise ÚV KSČ pro práci s mládeží ze dne 14. října 1976', National Archive in Prague (hereafter NA), Central Committee of the Communist Party Files (hereafter f. A ÚV KSČ), Komise pro práci s mládeží 1945–1989 (hereafter f. 10/20) folder 3, Archival Unit (hereafter AU) 12, sheet 35; See also Ivo Pondělíček, *Proměny filmového hlediště v ČSR (1966–1968): Filmologický sborník*, V. (Praha: ČSFU, 1969); Radko Hájek, *Současná kultura filmového diváka ČSR: Závěrečná zpráva výzkumu* (Praha: ČSFU, 1980); Miloslava Česneková, Helena Vostradovská and Radko Hájek, *Sociologická analýza filmu* (Praha: ČSFU, 1984–1985).

8) The Czechoslovak Communist Party had previously employed American films for ideological purposes. For example, in the late 1940s, they used some of Charlie Chaplin's films, and invoked aspects of his star persona, to criticize Hollywood and American capitalist democracy. See Jindřiška Bláhová, 'No place for peacemongers: Charlie Chaplin, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and Czechoslovak communist propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2009), pp. 271–292.

oriented American cinema in the second half of the twentieth century. For one, an examination of the organization's use of such fare broadens our appreciation of the conduct of the most influential body in Czechoslovak film culture at this time. In particular, it provides insights missing from existing quantitative studies, by considering how some American imports fitted into the political and economic strategies of this organization.⁹⁾ To date, historians have explained that the CSF underwrote audiovisual entertainment to distract citizens from social and political problems.¹⁰⁾ Yet, the roles of its imports remain poorly understood; this in spite of the fact that the CSF often considered such films to be better ideological tools than domestic productions, which some viewers avoided due to suspicions of propagandistic intent. The social, cultural, and political importance the CFD assigned to its youth-oriented American imports also reminds us that historians have concentrated on the *concerns* European claims-makers expressed about such fare in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, Daniel Biltereyst shows that stakeholders in 1950s Britain and France feared some Hollywood teen films could incite antisocial behavior among impressionable youngsters.¹¹⁾ Similarly, Uta G. Poiger details how comparable issues preoccupied the regimes of East and West Germany.¹²⁾ By contrast, the case of the CSF reveals some European elites drew fairly positive conclusions about this type of film.

Normalization, youth, and cinema

To better understand the CFD's handling of youth-oriented American imports in the 1970s and 1980s, it is helpful to recognize the impact of social and political developments which took place in the preceding years. The years 1967 and 1968 saw the liberal wing of the ruling Czechoslovak Communist Party push for political and economic reforms.¹³⁾ Calls for increased freedom of speech encouraged some young people, especially students, to voice their dissatisfaction of the regime.¹⁴⁾ In what became known as the Prague Spring, students rallied in cities such as Prague, and rebellious subcultures including hippies, punks, and, beatniks proliferated.¹⁵⁾ Such events suggested that a generational conflict was

9) Luděk Havel, 'Hollywood a normalizace' (MA Dissertation: Masaryk University, 2008).

10) Štěpán Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění* (Praha: Casablanca, 2011), pp. 290–292.

11) Daniel Biltereyst, 'American juvenile delinquency movies and the European censors: the cross-cultural reception and censorship of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel without a Cause*', in Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel (eds), *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), pp. 9–26.

12) Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 32.

13) Zdeněk Doskočil, *Duben 1969: Anatomie jednoho mocenského zvratu* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 2006); see also Vilém Prečan, *Proměny pražského jara: Sborník studií a dokumentů o nekapitulantských postojích v československé společnosti 1968–1969* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993).

14) Jaroslav Pažout, *Československé studentské hnutí v šedesátých letech dvacátého století* (Prague: Libri prohibiti, 2001); Milan Otáhal, *Studenti a komunistická moc v československých zemích 1968–1989* (Praha: Dokořán, 2003).

15) Miroslav Vaněk (ed.), *Ostrůvky svobody: kulturní a občanské aktivity mladé generace v 80. letech v Československu* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR and Votobia, 2002), p. 7; Miroslav Vaněk, *Byl to jenom rock 'n' roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956–1989* (Praha: Academia, 2010), p. 231.

gripping Czechoslovakia; the values these youths held dear appeared at odds to those of a parent generation that included conservative political elites.

The Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 ushered in a draconian period in the country's history known as normalization. The hardline Communists who had consistently seen the young dissenters as an affront to socialist mores and a threat to the regime now wielded greater sway over policy and public discourse.¹⁶⁾ These hardliners were shocked by the protests. As Christiane Brenner has pointed out, the Party had expected State-socialism to eradicate this type of problem; to produce a young people who supported the regime, especially when they had been raised exclusively under this system.¹⁷⁾ In response, hardliners attempted to discredit the protesters and present the Party as the sole guarantor of order, security, and prosperity.¹⁸⁾ These positions were part of a broader strategy that also included discrediting liberal journalists and liberal party members, which the Party used to foster the civil obedience it deemed central to normalization.¹⁹⁾

The ideological education of the country's young became a priority for the Czechoslovak Communist Party during normalization. In addition to commissioning studies on inter-generational tension and juvenile delinquency, the Party redrafted cultural policy to curtail dissent, placing its ideological commission in charge of it.²⁰⁾ The value the Party assigned to the youth-focused aspects of cultural policy was exemplified by its assuming control of Czechoslovakia's largest youth organization: the Socialist Youth Union (Socialistický svaz mládeže). This union was not only tasked with shaping young minds and producing the next generation of leaders, but its council was sought by the CSF when choosing youth-oriented films.²¹⁾ What is more, the Party's Committee for Working with Youth (Komise pro práci s mládeží) was made responsible for ensuring young people's free-time was built around activities that promoted socialist ideals, for policing youth-oriented publications and television broadcasts, and for supervising education centers, youth clubs, and film societies.²²⁾

Naturally, under normalization, cultural policy directly affected cinema.²³⁾ Thus, 1969 saw new editors-in-chief put in charge of film magazines to ensure journalists who had

16) Ibid, pp. 231–232.

17) Christiane Brenner, ‘Troublemakers! dealing with juvenile deviance and delinquency in Socialist Czechoslovakia’, *Acta historica Universitatis Silesianae Opaviensis*, no. 6 (2013), p. 126.

18) See Jaroslav Pažout, *Hnutí revoluční mládeže 1968–1970: edice dokumentů* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2004); Anon., ‘Proč byl leden nutný. Rozhovor Rudého práva se soudruhem Gustávem Husákem’, *Rudé právo*, 5 January 1970, p. 3.

19) Petr Cajthaml, ‘Nástup normalizace v televizní publicistice a dokumentu’, in Petr Kopal (ed.), *Film a dějiny 4, Normalizace* (Praha: Casablanca and Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2014), pp. 17–24.

20) See Brenner, ‘Troublemakers!’, pp. 123–137; see also Christiane Brenner, ‘Líné dívky, lehké dívky? “Příživnictví” a disciplína mladých žen v době normalizace’, *Dějiny a současnost*, vol. 9, no. 7 (2013), pp. 19–22.

21) An interview with Aleš Danielis, 23. 3. 2013 (author's archive).

22) The Socialist Youth Union Charta, <http://www.totalita.cz/txt/txt_ssm_stanovy.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2014]; On film clubs see Vladimír Slanař, ‘Filmové kluby dětí a mládeže’ (MA Dissertation: Filmová a Televizní Fakulta Akademie Múzických Umění, 1988).

23) Jiří Purš, ‘Projev ředitele Čs. filmu Jiřího Purše z roku 1970’, in Jiří Havelka, *Čs. filmové hospodářství 1966–1970* (Praha: Československý filmový ústav, 1976), pp. 16–19; ‘Zpráva o plnění Realizační směrnice a další úkoly ideologické činnosti strany, projednané na 2. schůzi ideologické komise ÚV KSČ konané dne

survived the purges of early normalization toed the party line. Party elites also publicly distinguished between the films they found acceptable and unacceptable.²⁴⁾ For example, in an address to the Socialist Youth Union, new Party general secretary Gustav Husák — the face of normalization — denounced some films as peddling “filth, perversion, negativity” and offering little “positive, pure, nice, or cultural.”²⁵⁾ Similarly, the newly appointed director of the CSF accused some filmmakers of corrupting youth with “the wrong philosophical, political, and ideological perspectives.”²⁶⁾ In the hope that it might limit young people’s exposure to themes of nihilism, relativism, and negativity, which the Party deemed anathematic to socialist society, the CSF instructed theaters to only screen films that disseminated Socialist ideals.²⁷⁾ It also withdrew from circulation twenty-three locally produced “anti-communist films”, including new-wave fare like *THE FIREMEN’S BALL* (1967) and *THE CREMATOR* (1968), and condemned imports it saw as “promoting the western way of life.”²⁸⁾ However, at the same time, the CSF recognized some youth-oriented films could be used to advance Party policy and thus catalyze normalization. Such pictures were usually played at the Youth Film Festival in the city of Trutnov (Filmový festival mládeže) and on the Youth and Culture television program (*Mládež a kultura*).²⁹⁾ Among them were those positing parents as accountable for their unruly offspring.

17. června 1970, NA, A ÚV KSČ, Fond Ideologická komise ÚV KSČ (hereafter f. 1261/1/15), folder 1, AU 2, note, 0, l. 6; On normalization in the film industry see: Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění*; on normalization more generally see, for instance: Milan Otáhal, ‘O vztahu společnosti k normalizačnímu vedení’, in Oldřich Tůma and Tomáš Vilímek (eds), *Česká společnost v 70. a 80. letech: sociální a ekonomické aspekty* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2012), pp. 247–284; Zdeněk Hejzlar, *Praha ve stínu Stalina a Brežněva: Vznik a porážka reformního komunismu v Československu* (Praha: Práce, 1991).

24) Believing that audiences could be both measured and understood, the CSF commissioned sociological research into why individuals attended theaters and expressed preferences for certain genres, subject matter, and sites of production. These studies were expected to make it possible for the organization to devise a formula for appealing to the enlightened socialist moviegoer, which is to say those viewers who were “sensitive to the ethics and issues of modern society”. In other words, the film authorities tried to engineer a situation where audiences would “naturally” choose, say, a Bulgarian film about struggling factory workers over an American musical. Youth figured into this research. The authorities were, for example, concerned by young people who did not pursue tertiary education expressing a preference for spectacle-driven entertainment. Knoflíčková, *Podíl filmu*, p. 11.

25) Husák, ‘Ustavující celostátní konference’, p. 26.

26) Purš, ‘Projev ředitele Čs. filmu’, p. 16.

27) Jiří Purš, *Obrysy vývoje československé národní kinematografie, (1945–1918)* (Praha: ČSFÚ, 1985), p. 101.

28) Purš, ‘Projev ředitele Čs. filmu’, p. 17; On the restrictions on films distributed in Czechoslovakia see Jiří Purš, ‘Naše úkoly a cíle’, in Ondroušek (ed.), *Za socialistické filmové umění*, p. 89; ‘Zápis z 2. schůze ideologické komise ÚV KSČ konané dne 17. června 1970’, NA, f. ÚV KSČ, 1261/1/15, folder 1, AU 2, note, 0b, pp. 5–6, sheets 7–8; ‘Návrh organizačního, kádrového a obsahově-funkčního uspořádání odboru kulturní politiky ÚŘ ČSF’, National Film Archive in Prague (hereafter NFA), Central Directorate of the Czechoslovak State Film Files (hereafter f. ÚŘ ČSF), 1972, R12/AII/3P/2K.

29) ‘Filmová distribuce v roce 1968, 08. 11. 1967’, NFA, f. ÚŘ ČSF, Folder ÚŘ ČSF kolegiální porady 1967, zahraničí a distribuce 70. léta, R10/BI/4P/1K, p. 8; ‘Osnova rámcové koncepce výchovy filmového diváka, 12.12.1967’, NFA, f. ÚŘ ČSF, R10/BI/4P/1K, p. 6.

Juvenile delinquency, parenting, and REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE

Where some European elites found REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (1955/1969) objectionable, the CFD considered this film so important that it granted it a premiere at the prestigious Workers Film Festival (Filmový festival pracujících) — a roadshow maximizing the availability of ideologically significant films.³⁰⁾ Some British politicians and journalists had derided REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE as "poisonous stuff for the teddy inclined adolescents", East German authorities had denounced the film as mass culture trash, and their West German counterparts had feared it would provoke riots and destabilize gender relations.³¹⁾ By contrast, the CFD found value in this picture's renditions of a dysfunctional family, ineffectual childrearing, and adolescent self-destruction. At the time, the Committee for Working with Youth emphasized parenting was central to the production of upstanding socialist citizens,³²⁾ with the Party's flagship newspaper *Rudé právo* printing numerous articles on the ideological education of the young. One tract published when REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE was on general release blamed student dissent partly on the parent generation instilling lax morals and values into its offspring.³³⁾

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE enabled the CFD to blame the juvenile delinquency that the Party claimed was sweeping the country on parents, and, by extension, to absolve the authorities themselves of responsibility. The mouthpiece of the CSF, *Filmový přehled*, spotlighted the generalizable nature of the themes summoned by this film, stressing "juvenile delinquency was not restricted to American society".³⁴⁾ The magazine also invited readers to draw comparisons between the adult world depicted in the film and Czechoslovakia's socialist system of governance, insisting that REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE "showed juvenile criminality was usually a product of substandard parenting leading to psychological problems in the young".³⁵⁾ It framed the film as a cautionary tale, one which promised to prevent youngsters from "polluting" Czechoslovakia like their older siblings had in the late 1960s. "Young people who do not trust adults, who do not trust their parent and teachers, and who do not believe in the social order these adults created", mused one writer, "find themselves drawn to that symbol of rebellion: the gang".³⁶⁾ This position suggested that the social unrest which had blighted the previous decade could be prevented by a loving home, thereby encouraging parents to attend to the generational conflicts that the Party insisted underpinned such unrest in the first place.³⁷⁾

30) Havelka, *Čs. filmové hospodářství 1966–1970*, p. 74.

31) Biltereyst, 'American juvenile delinquency', p. 19; Poigner, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, pp. 77–85, 108–110.

32) 'Závěry 1. schůze komise ÚV KSČ pro práci s mládeží ze dne 14. října 1976', p. 13.

33) Jan Beránek and Josef Mužík, 'K problémům světonázorové výchovy na vysokých školách. Hledat a nacházet pravdu', *Rudé právo*, 13 January 1970, p. 3; See also z., 'Vychovávat mladé lidi v třídně uvědomělé občany', *Rudé právo*, 8 November 1969, p. 1; Jiřina Lišková, 'Z vlastního přesvědčení', *Rudé právo*, 5 December, 1969, p. 3; tt., 'O mládí, mládeži a generacích', *Mladý svět* vol. 12, no. 3, 1970, p. 20.

34) Anon., 'Rebel bez příčiny', *Filmový přehled*, 7 November 1969, p. 4.

35) Ibid.

36) Ibid; 'Distribuční list č. 9/70, ÚPE, 25. 12. 1969', NFA, Sbírká reklamních materiálů k českým i zahraničním filmům.

37) Controlled by the Socialist Youth Union after 1970, the widely read youth magazine *Mladý svět* ran a series of articles in which Communist top brass insisted young people should stop criticizing the parent generation

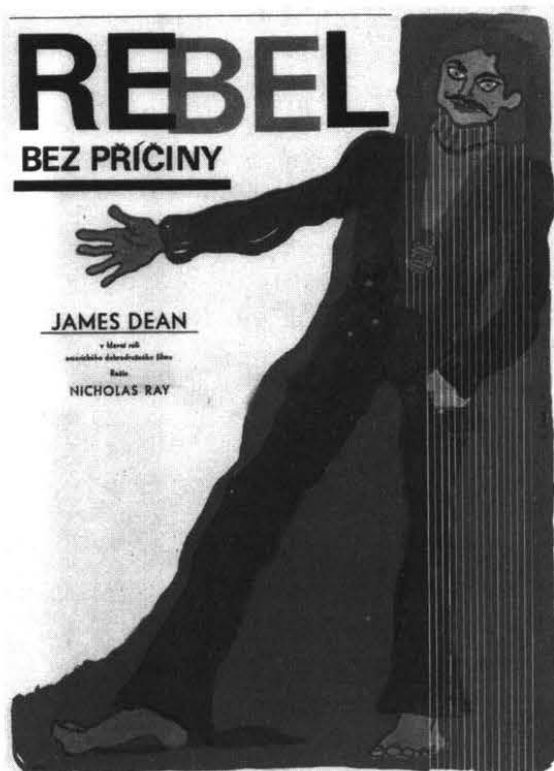


Fig. 1 The Czechoslovak poster for *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*

The CFD's promotion of *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* also spotlighted a figure which some Communists had consistently invoked as a symbol of failed parenting and western social decay: the hippie (see Figure 1). Whereas the liberal wing of the Party had indirectly facilitated the student protests and the proliferation of youth subcultures, hardliners had long since denounced both, singling out hippies as the most insidious of dissenters. As far back as the mid 1960s, pro-hardline newspapers had demonized the American counterculture, spotlighting permissiveness, drug use, and aimlessness as evidence of young people losing their way under capitalist democracy. Moreover, following several protests, Prague's municipal council had warned it would clamp down on hippies for their purported transgression of appropriate socialist behaviors.³⁸⁾ In his aforementioned address to the Socialist Youth Union, Husák even suggested un-socialist cinema

had seduced otherwise well-adjusted young Czechoslovaks into a "western Hippie underworld".³⁹⁾ Replacing the bankable James Dean whose image had dominated *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*'s American poster with one of a young man sporting bellbottoms, a flowered shirt, and long hair, allowed the CFD to convey precisely who it considered the rebels without a cause to be, and who parents should fear their children might become. The CFD's use of *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* to advance the Party line on juvenile delinquency and parenting was superseded by its appropriation of other youth-oriented American imports to critique American capitalist democracy.

and redirect their energies to Party-endorsed undertakings. See Anon., 'Na otázku Mladého světa odpovídá JUDr. Felix Vašečka, Csc, ministr spravedlnosti ČSR', *Mladý svět* vol. 12, no. 5, 1970, p. 3; Anon., 'Na otázky Mladého světa odpovídá ministr zdravotnictví České socialistické republiky, RNDr. Vladislav Vlček', *Mladý svět* vol. 12, no. 8, 1970, p. 3; Anon., 'Na otázky Mladého světa odpovídá ministr zemědělství a výživy slovenské socialistické republiky Ing. Jan Janovic, CSc', *Mladý svět*, vol. 12, no. 9, (1970), p. 3.

38) Vaněk, *Byl to jenom*, p. 232.

39) Ibid.

Idealization, American capitalist democracy, and counterculture pictures

In the early 1970s, the CSF prioritized youth-oriented American imports that enabled it to spotlight the supposed generational tensions, social problems, and political upheavals blighting the United States. Consequently, the Central Distribution Company framed several counterculture pictures in a manner that suggested the turmoil they depicted revealed the dire consequences of the reforms both the Party's liberal wing and students demanded in the late 1960s. The organization used SUMMERTREE (1971/1973), FIVE EASY PIECES, and THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT (1970/1976) to posit that, rather than guaranteeing freedom, capitalist democracy precipitated tyranny; a position which in turn suggested that the Soviet-led invasion of 1968 deserved to be credited for saving Czechoslovaks from a similar fate. These films were positioned as a direct contrast to CFD releases depicting young people in socialist countries. On the one hand, the Soviet-imports O LJUBVI (1970) and TENDERNESS (1970/1972), and the domestically made METRÁČEK (1971) and MŮJ BRÁCHA MÁ PRIMA BRÁCHU (My Brother Has a Great Brother 1973), foregrounded humanist themes like interpersonal relationships, romantic love, and social responsibility and harmony. On the other, the CSF-produced musicals TŘICET PANNEN A PYTHAGORAS (Thirty Maidens and Pythagoras, 1973) and HOLKY Z PORCELÁNU, among others, showed Czechoslovak youth contently studying and apprenticing.⁴⁰⁾

This anti-American approach to framing youth-oriented US imports unfolded during a highly draconian period in Czechoslovak history that Jaromír Blažejovský calls "normalization on the offensive".⁴¹⁾ Policymakers like Jan Fojtík, a member of the Central Committee's Ideological Commission responsible for media and culture, feared Czechoslovakia's pro-American youth destabilized State-socialism and threatened mass defections to the west.⁴²⁾ In response, hardliners sought to stop young people from viewing capitalist nations in general and the United States in particular as beacons of progressivity. Suggesting that such positions derived from romantic fantasy involved contrasting the putative vices of capitalism with the apparent virtues of socialism.⁴³⁾ The CSF believed that some US counterculture pictures promised to undermine young people's idealization of life in this paradigm of capitalist democracy.

The CSF selected SUMMERTREE from a cluster of films critical of America's invasion and occupation of Vietnam due to the overt nature of its denunciation of US governmental policy. At the time, the Czechoslovak press regularly condemned Washington for its operations in this Southeast Asian country. The Communist Party's flagship film magazine *Kino* had for example attacked the bellicosity of the pro-Vietnam opus THE GREEN BERETS (1968). It had also printed interviews with high-profile American liberals who had spoken out against the war, including blacklisted director Elia Kazan and the actress and

40) The CFD continued to release positive portrayals of student life under State-socialism across the 1980s. Such films included *Snowdrops and Dabs* and *How the World Loses Poets* (both 1982).

41) Jaromír Blažejovský, 'A Time of the Servants (1969–1989)', in Sylvestrová (ed.), *Czech Film Posters of the 20th Century*, p. 108.

42) 'Záznam z 2. schůze ideologické komise ÚV KSČ, 17. června 1970', NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 1261/1/15 folder 1, AU. 2, note, 0.

43) Doskočil, *Duben* 1969, p. 21.

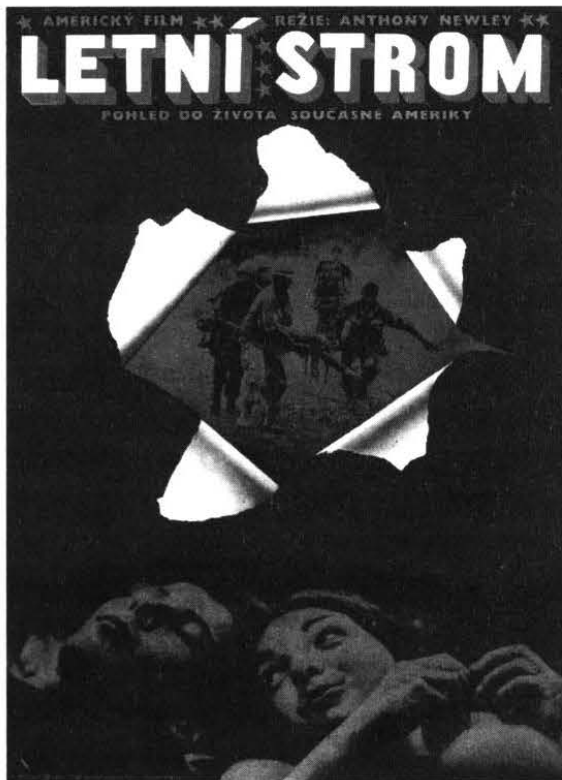


Fig. 2 The Czechoslovak poster for SUMMERTREE

couple lying beneath a night sky, pierced, as if by a bullet, to reveal the bloodshed and horror of US military action (see Figure 2). By contrast, Columbia Pictures sold the film to American audiences as a bittersweet romance — “Once there was a girl and a guitar and a summertime” read its promotional poster.

FIVE EASY PIECES permitted the CFD to spotlight the youth alienation hardliners had diagnosed as a symptom of America’s crumbling capitalist democracy.⁴⁷⁾ Stateside, this film was sold as a largely indeterminate quality drama based on the apparent virtuoso performance of star Jack Nicholson and the purported vision of director Bob Rafelson. However, *Filmový přehled* suggested that this tale of a bourgeois dropout was further evidence of “the psychological confusion of young Americans today” and their “futile search for something meaningful.”⁴⁸⁾ The supposed pressures of life in the United States were also emphasized in the film’s print advertising. Where lobby cards pictured a confrontation between two young men, promotional posters featured an expressionistic image of a young man’s blinding rage. Encapsulating the despair many young Americans allegedly felt at

activist Jane Fonda. Rather than being voiced by Communists, these denunciations of a system purportedly built on social inequality, genocide, and bloodlust were shown to be articulated by American citizens themselves.⁴⁴⁾ SUMMERTREE, the story of a young draft dodger fleeing to Canada, was seen to exhibit so much political value that it, like REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE earlier, was granted a spot at the Workers Film Festival.⁴⁵⁾ Moreover, its portrayal of the injustices of US capitalist democracy and expansionism allowed *Filmový přehled* to posit an irreconcilable tension between Washington’s objectives and those of the “outraged” young Americans who refused to “fight for goals that were not their own.”⁴⁶⁾ Boasting a tagline that emphasized social engagement (“An Insight into Contemporary America”), the CFD’s print advertising pictured US foreign policy as a ruthless folly doing untold damage to youth. It featured a young

44) jb., ‘Rozpaky kolem Vietnamu’, *Záběr*, 7 January 1971, p. 6; A. Špindlerová, ‘Případ Elia Kazan’, *Kino*, 26 February 1973, p. 15; Anon., ‘Je na čase, aby Amerika odhodila sombréra a kolty’, *Kino*, 22 May 1973, pp. 3–4.

45) BK., ‘Letní strom’, *Filmový přehled*, 29 December 1972, p. 3.

46) *Ibid.*

47) L. Oliva, ‘Skromná mnohostrannost’, *Kino*, 4 December 1973, p. 5.

48) Anon., ‘Malé životní etudy’, *Filmový přehled*, 2 November 1973, p. 2.

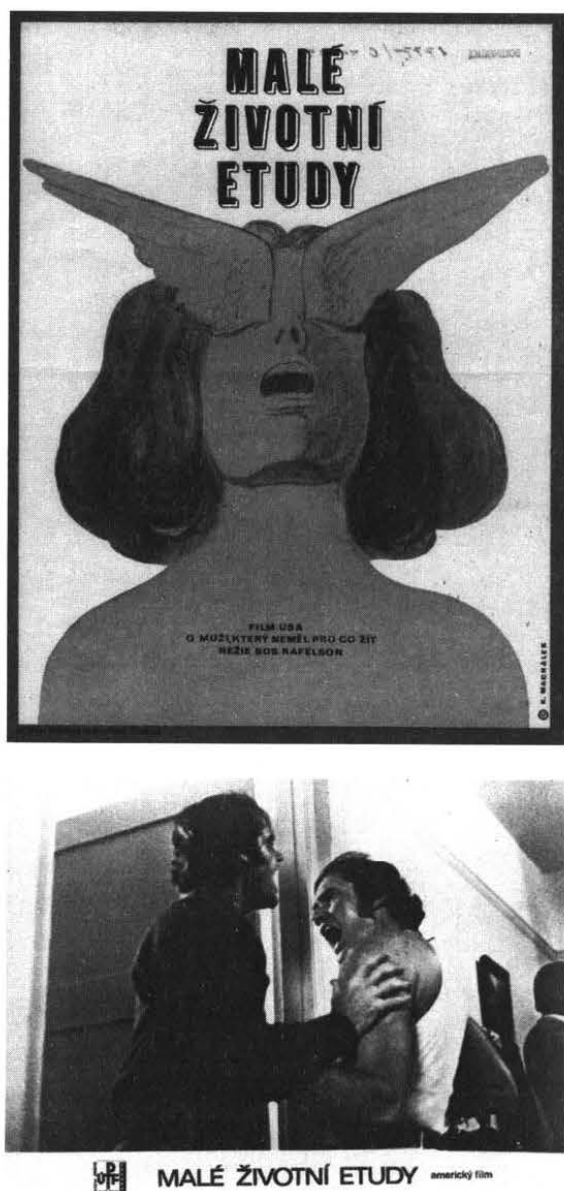


Fig. 3 FIVE EASY PIECES' Czechoslovak poster (top) and one of its lobby cards (bottom)

this time, an accompanying tagline read: “About a man who had nothing to live for” (see Figure 3).

THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT allowed the CFD to suggest that many young Americans were dissatisfied with the very freedoms Czechoslovak youths and Party liberals demanded.⁴⁹⁾ The US marketing of this film was influenced by Hollywood's concerns about counterculture pictures causing public relations headaches, angering the influential college press, and failing to attract large audiences.⁵⁰⁾ It highlighted a romance between two students innocently enjoying the tertiary education they had worked hard to receive, and their being innocently caught up in protests they did not understand. By contrast, the artwork with which the CFD promoted this story of campus protests invoked the idea of a nation on the brink of collapse. It billed THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT as “The US Film Awarded a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival”. The presence of the municipal-sounding “US” instead of the more commonly used “American” was significant. In the context of an image of a make-up-clad Statue of Liberty that looked rather like a caricature of imperial Roman busts, this semantic nuance evoked an empire whose bold public façade barely concealed its structural unsoundness (see Figure 4). Such themes were developed in

press discussion of the film. Journalists used THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT to support American protestors, by casting their actions as an understandable response to the injustices of capitalist democracy. At the same time, they used the film to mount attacks on those who had voiced disapproval of State-socialist Czechoslovakia, where, they maintained, such putatively intolerable conditions simply did not exist.⁵¹⁾ Commentators insist-

49) This film also allowed the Ideological Committee to fulfill its brief of showcasing “capitalist governments’ clamping down on student radicals”. ‘Závěry 1. schůze komise ÚV KSČ pro práci s mládeží ze dne 14. října 1976’, sheet 37.

50) See Aniko Bodroghkozy, ‘Reel revolutionaries: an examination of Hollywood’s cycle of 1960s youth rebellion films’, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2002), pp. 38–58.

51) *Atentát na kulturu*, Czechoslovak State Television, originally aired 1977.

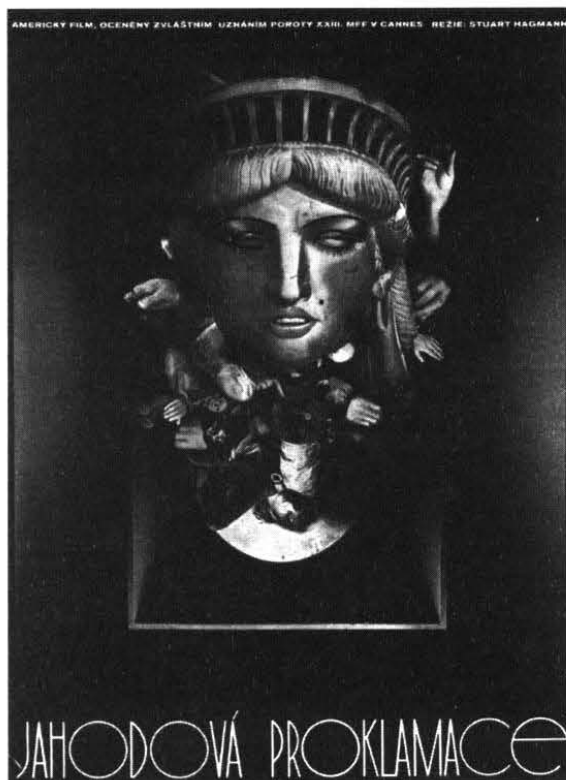


Fig. 4 The Czechoslovak Poster for
THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT

ed that misguided young Czechoslovaks had no real grounds to challenge the regime.⁵²⁾ When presented less as acts of legitimate political engagement than as protesting for the sake of it, these young people's actions could be dismissed and ultimately contained as juvenile posturing. Appropriating youth-oriented American films to discredit segments of Czechoslovak youth continued unabated albeit using different films for different reasons.

Deviant subcultures, anodyne alternatives, and musical movies

In the late 1970s, the CFD mainly used youth-oriented American imports, musical movies to be exact, as anodyne alternatives to subversive subcultures. By mid decade, the Czechoslovak Communist Party was convinced that several subaltern music scenes were leading otherwise up-

standing young people into un-socialist thinking. Chief among the culprits, it felt, were rock, punk, and "underground" — a form of psychedelic rock that developed in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s — all of which operated beyond the Party's purview due to holding events at unlicensed venues.⁵³⁾ As the agenda of the Committee for Working with Youth and a conference held in Moscow in 1983 both demonstrated,⁵⁴⁾ the Party feared that, what it saw as, anti-socialist provocateurs would grow in numbers, initiating a groundswell of calls for reform. Whereas the Party's concerns had primarily been directed at students following their protests in the late 1960s, now both its Committee for Working with Youth and film experts identified another vulnerable segment of the population. Young male trade apprentices were deemed at-risk on the rather patronizing grounds that their supposed intellectual limitations made them particularly susceptible to the "patently anti-socialist" values of the music subcultures.⁵⁵⁾

Where scholars have explained how such concerns led the Czechoslovak Communist Party to crack down on these formations, we must also recognize that it employed less op-

52) Anon., 'Jahodová proklamace', *Filmový přehled*, 14 May 1976; L. Oliva, 'Proklamace a protesty ve filmu USA', *Kino*, 1 June 1976, p. 3.

53) Vaněk, *Byl to jenom*, p. 342.

54) Ibid., pp. 338–342.

55) 'Některé poznatky o současném působení buržoazní propagandy a ideologické diverze na mladou generaci hodnocení období 1980–84', Komise ÚV KSČ pro práci s mládeží, 4. schůze, 22. 2. 1984, NA, A AÚV KSČ, f. 10/10.

pressive strategies.⁵⁶⁾ It is clear that the Party directed charges of low quality and social failure at the musical genres around which these subcultures were built. For one, it accused them of failing to fulfill socialist culture’s function of enriching citizens through “the beauty of music, words, and human movement”, and of preventing the social engagement and collectivism art was meant to foster.⁵⁷⁾ These styles were accused of sounding “ugly” due to their “repetitiveness, primitiveness, and monotony”, of being escapist because their “anti-socialist lyrics spread nihilism and hopelessness”, and of promoting individualism.⁵⁸⁾ However, the Party also sought to offset the influence of such formations by promoting musical genres it felt posed no threat to State-socialism.

On the one hand, the CSF pushed films centered on state-approved genres of music based on discourses of maturity, heritage, and quality. This practice can be traced back to 1973, when the CFD had used its rerelease of *WEST SIDE STORY* (1961) to stress that the film’s soundtrack fulfilled the Socialist view of culture needing to enrich and enlighten citizens.⁵⁹⁾ The organization considered Leonard Bernstein’s show tunes so important that it promoted them above the film’s themes of racial conflict (much like its US distributor had done), which it could have easily invoked to spotlight American social injustice. The state-owned record label Supraphon issued *WEST SIDE STORY*’s soundtrack and *Kino* printed the sheet-music and Czech-language lyrics to the song “Tonight” in a manner reminiscent of classical music.

The CFD pursued this strategy consistently in the early 1980s, when it released several films built around rock ‘n’ roll music. As with jazz, the authorities publically accepted rock ‘n’ roll, on the grounds that its heritage imbued it with greater cultural value than modern trends, whose own relationships to earlier styles were conveniently sidestepped due to their dissenting fan bases.⁶⁰⁾ The CFD posited the superiority of rock ‘n’ roll, with copy advertising for *AMERICAN HOT WAX* (1978/1982) claiming that the genre’s true worth had become “more apparent with the passing of time”.⁶¹⁾ Similarly, the biopic *ELVIS* (1979/1982) was advertised on the esteem in which this performer was held by other musicians. Presley was placed on a pedestal alongside another favorite of the authorities, Louis Armstrong, whom they had invited to play in Prague. Moreover, because state-controlled theaters were easier to supervise than the clubs and private premises which hosted gigs, it would appear that the Central Distribution Company sought to draw youth to the former. It did so by promoting rock ‘n’ roll movies such as *AMERICAN HOT WAX* and *LET’S SPENT THE NIGHT TOGETHER* (1982) in a manner which likened them to live concerts.

Conversely, the CFD drew on the Party’s view that some forms of popular culture were useful “if not for their artistic merit, then their capacity to connect with people, especial-

56) Vaněk, *Byl to jenom*.

57) ‘Zpráva o současném stavu zábavné hudby a opatření ke zvýšení její ideové úrovně’, NA, A ÚV KSČ, Praha — komise; NA, Fond Ministerstva kultury (hereafter f. MK ČSR), folder 129.

58) Vaněk, *Byl to jen*, p. 245.

59) L. Oliva, ‘Romeo, Julie a West Side Story’, *Kino*, 12 September 1973, p. 6.

60) The Party’s tolerance of jazz led to the wide release of films featuring this style of music, including *All that Jazz* (1979).

61) mim., ‘V zajetí hudby’, *Filmový přehled*, no. 7 (1982), p. 23.



Fig. 5 The Czechoslovak Poster for SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

ly the young", when it purposed American disco films to counter the unsanctioned subcultures.⁶²⁾ At this time, the Party felt that some low genres and performers could be "interpolated into ideological policy".⁶³⁾ The Communist Parties of Eastern Europe largely accepted disco music and the venues playing it.⁶⁴⁾ By the late 1970s, even Moscow had embraced acts like Boney M and their numerous homegrown imitators.⁶⁵⁾ Disco music was also a mainstay of Czechoslovakia's state-controlled night clubs, with Party-affiliated composers and songwriters such as Jaroslav Machek, Karel Svoboda, and František Ringo Čech penning anodyne lyrics, which the authorities endorsed. Čech's "Diskotéka" (1978) even advanced the official party line on disco with lyrics such as "guess where we're going to dance tonight, enjoy ourselves, and sing? Guess where we're going to have a good time, and celebrate your sixteenth birthday? At the discotheque".⁶⁶⁾ The CFD there-

fore took great interest in the blockbuster SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER, promoting the film on its soundtrack, star, and portrayal of disco culture.⁶⁷⁾ Promotional taglines read "John Travolta in the American Music Film — Music, the Bee Gees, and the Brooklyn King of the Discotheque" (see Figure 5). The Czechoslovak campaign therefore came close to that which Paramount Pictures used for SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER's 1979 US rerelease, when it was framed as an anodyne musical akin to GREASE (1978), rather than the hard-edged

62) 'Zpráva o plnění Realizační směrnice a další úkoly ideologické činnosti strany, projednané na 2. Schůzi ideologické komise ÚV KSČ konané dne 17. června 1970', NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 1261/1/15, folder 1, AU 2, note, 0, l. 6.

63) Ibid.

64) On disco music in other Soviet satellites see for example Karin Taylor, *Let's Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006).

65) Vasily Shumov, 'The golden era of Soviet discos', *Russia & India Report*, 16 September 2013. <http://in.rbth.com/arts/2013/09/16/the_golden_era_of_soviet_discos_29399.html> [accessed 17 November 2014]; Sergei I. Zhuk, 'The "closed" Soviet society and the west: the consumption of the western cultural products, youth and identity in the Soviet Ukraine during the 1970s', in Marie-Janine Calic, Dietmar Neutatz and Julia Obertreis (eds), *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity: The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 96–99.

66) Original lyrics: "Kampak půjdem dneska večer tančit, radovat se, zpívat, no tak hádej / kam se půjdem dneska bavit a tvých šestnáct slavit, no tak hádej — diskotéka". Discobolos — Diskotéka, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExDQIUUDggl>> [accessed 28 November 2014].

67) 'Distribuční list 163/79, 30.08.1979', NFA, Sbírka reklamních materiálů; 'Horečka sobotní noci', C/1886/98218, NFA, Sbírka reklamních materiálů.

subculture film it was initially sold as being.⁶⁸⁾ The CFD also used *XANADU* (1980/1985), an incoherent tale of a young couple renovating a roller disco, which *Filmový přehled* dubbed a "fairytale which pulses to a disco beat",⁶⁹⁾ as a cinematic equivalent to state-sanctioned musical venues. This approach stood in direct contrast to the film's US marketing campaign, which had underplayed its disco content to avoid association with what had become an unpopular trend stateside.⁷⁰⁾ Lobby cards also invited moviegoers to draw parallels to well-liked television variety shows such as *TELEVARIETÉ* (1971–1998); the face of apolitical entertainment under the Czechoslovak Communist Party. While central to the CFD's youth-oriented American releases at this time, the escapist qualities of musical movies would become ever more salient as the 1980s drew to a close.

Depolitization, the female citizen-consumer, and musical movies

Toward the end of Communist rule, the CFD used several new American musical movies to temper consumer frustration, positing the notion that, in spite of what they might think, people were enjoying a period of liberalization. In reality, the 1980s was an especially challenging time for many Czechoslovaks. Perestroika, which had started to address some of the social, cultural, and economic problems of the USSR, had yet to spread to this Soviet satellite. Czechoslovakia's planned economy was struggling, thus limiting the availability of goods and services, and restricting professional and leisure opportunities.⁷¹⁾ These concerns were in part a sign of disenchantment at the Party's strict control of official culture and the restrictions it placed on international travel.⁷²⁾ As domestic managers, women experienced the former firsthand. They were left especially disheartened, by, among other things, a shortage of personal hygiene products and household supplies.⁷³⁾ Young people felt particularly pessimistic however, with many hardliners predictably fearing these "bored youths" might fall into the clutches of underground subcultures.⁷⁴⁾

The Czechoslovak Communist Party attempted to quell its citizens' frustrations with the promise of an improved form of State-socialism that would match the quality and variety of consumer goods available in the west. Yet, in spite of such rhetoric, the Party

68) See Richard Nowell, 'Hollywood don't skate: US production trends, industry analysis, and the roller-disco movie', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2013), p. 83.

69) *mim.*, 'Xanadu', *Filmový přehled*, no. 6 (1985), p. 29.

70) Nowell, 'Hollywood don't skate', p. 86.

71) Milan Sekanina, 'Nedokončená: Československá ekonomika v druhé polovině 80. let minulého století', *Acta Oeconomica Pragensia*, vol. 15, no. 7 (2007), p. 338; Alexej Bálek, 'Československá ekonomika v osmdesátých letech 20. století', *Acta oeconomica pragensia*, vol. 15, no. 7 (2007), pp. 45–54.

72) Lubomír Kopeček, 'Cesta k listopadu: komunistický režim, společnost a opozice v éře normalizace', in *Éra nevinnosti: Česká politika 1989–1997* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2010), p. 15.

73) *Ibid.*

74) J. Bílková, 'Nejen o mládeži, nejen pro mládež', *Kino*, 22 November 1988, p. 4; See also 'Zpráva o populačním vývoji ČSSR a návrh v postup v populační politice v dnešním období, 07.09.1982', NA, f. ÚV KSČ 1945–1989 — Předsednictvo ÚV KSČ 1981–1986. On youth violence at the end of State-socialism see Ondřej Daniel, 'Násilí československé mládeže na konci státního socialismu: Bezpečnostní riziko a téma společenské kritiky', in Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka, and Jakub Machek (eds), *Populární kultura v českém prostoru* (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), pp. 274–290.

showed little commitment to meaningful change, hoping it might placate the people by depoliticizing the cultural sphere.⁷⁵⁾ Consequently, the CFD deemphasized ideological education and instead suggested it was treating citizens less as subjects than as media consumers.⁷⁶⁾ The organization hoped that by diversifying output it could present cinema as proof positive of the liberalizing processes which supposedly set apart 1980s Czechoslovakia from the normalization of the previous decade. In this respect, it made important symbolical gestures by releasing films that dealt with hitherto unacceptable subjects or that had been made by blacklisted talent or which it had banned following the protests of the 1960s.⁷⁷⁾ For instance, the CSF issued *HAIR* (1979), a picture directed by Miloš Forman — persona non grata following his defection to the United States — which portrayed the once demonized hippie as an agent of positive social change.

Bypassing official notions of art as obligated to provoke intellectual, social, and political stimulation, the CFD suggested that some musical movies offered Czechoslovaks a temporary escape into fantasy. For example, this notion was thematized in the CSF-produced *DISCOPŘÍBĚH* (1987), a self-reflexive musical about one of the disillusioned Czechoslovak youths described above retreating into upbeat pop songs. It was also central to the CFD's handling of newly imported American musical movies whose marketing campaigns in large part echoed those used to sell them in the United States. Consequently, a measure of otherworldliness was suggested by print advertizing for *DIRTY DANCING*, which retained the English-language term "Dirty Dance" in an otherwise Czech-language tagline translated as "The Story of Love in the Style of 'Dirty Dance'". The notion of a temporary withdrawal from the frustrations and banality of everyday life was conveyed iconographically as well, with promotional posters setting dirty dancers against a palm tree. In conjunction with the *MIAMI VICE* (1984–1990) style of the poster, this imagery summoned not the film's rural upstate New York setting but Florida beach resorts which travel restrictions had rendered unreachable to almost all Czechoslovaks (see Figure 6).

Much like American distributors, the CFD also suggested that such films offered Czechoslovaks romance and titillation. It therefore underplayed *DIRTY DANCING*'s leftist subtext of generational and class conflict,⁷⁸⁾ and its themes of coming-of-age, in favor of spotlighting a love affair between a teenager and her dance instructor. Similarly, it pitched *FLASHDANCE* as "a story of love, jealousy, and misunderstanding between paramours".⁷⁹⁾ What is more, where *Filmový přehled* announced *DIRTY DANCING* featured "the most erotic dance" ever seen and that the film elicited an erotic charge "second only to lovemaking",⁸⁰⁾ marketing materials emphasized *FLASHDANCE*'s "erotic and dynamic dance num-

75) Kopeček, 'Cesta k listopadu', pp. 10–22;

76) Aleš Danielis and Radko Hájek, 'Film a divák (I)', *Film a doba*, no. 1 (1989), p. 24; Aleš Danielis and Radko Hájek, 'Film a divák VII, Francouzské a italské filmy', *Film a doba*, no. 7 (1989), p. 394; Danielis and Hájek, 'Film a divák X. Nové světy', p. 557; Jiří Tvrzník, 'Znovu do kin', *Kino*, 25 April 1989, pp. 4–5.

77) On the impact of liberalization on film distribution see Tvrzník, 'Znovu do kin', pp. 4–5; Helena Hejčová, 'Rozhovor s ústředním dramaturgem ÚPF dr. Aloisem Humplíkem', *Kino*, 8 December 1989, pp. 3–4.

78) For discussions of the political dimensions of *Dirty Dancing* see various contributions to Yannis Tzioumakis (ed.), *The Time of Our Lives: Dirty Dancing and Popular Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

79) mim., 'Flashdance', *Filmový přehled*, no. 7 (1987), p. 9.

80) mf., 'Hříšný tanec', *Filmový přehled*, no. 8 (1989), p. 5.



Figure 6 The Czechoslovak poster for *DIRTY DANCING* (1987)

bers".⁸¹⁾ In both cases, the emotional and corporeal pleasures these films purportedly excited were framed as expressions of young women's growing sense of self-confidence.⁸²⁾ For example, both promotional materials and *Kino* magazine positioned *FLASHDANCE*'s leading lady Jennifer Beals and her character as strong, independent role models.⁸³⁾ As the benefactor of such depoliticized entertainment, the CSF in turn positioned itself, and, by extension, the Party it represented, as newly open-minded, permissive even; as a benevolent regime befitting a new age of reform.⁸⁴⁾

Conclusion

Where historians have shed considerable light on why some European elites harbored concerns about the themes and influence of certain American teen films, this essay has shown that the CSF via its distri-

bution branch the Central Film Distributor appropriated other youth-oriented US imports to advance various aspects of its late Cold War agenda. This institution initially used *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* to make the case that young people's calls for social and economic reform were less legitimate protests against a flawed political system than a failure of parenting, and that parents rather than the state should prevent further outbursts of what the Party cast as juvenile delinquency. Thereafter, it released a series of American counterculture films in order to suggest that young people felt alienated from capitalist democracy, and that youthful grievances stateside were directed at problems that did not exist under State-socialism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the CFD appropriated several American musical movies as a means of promoting what it deemed to be benign genres like disco and rock 'n' roll as alternatives to indigenous musical subcultures that were thought to incubate antiauthoritarianism and dissent. By 1989, the film monopoly disseminated other musical movies to suggest that their status as sexy, escapist fantasies exemplified a newly liberalized cultural sphere, one geared to quelling growing frustration among the general population, especially women. These four strategies reveal that the CSF did not just release the occasional American youth film begrudgingly to placate audience

81) mim., 'Flashdance', p. 9.

82) Jff., 'V tanečním rytmu do hlubin hříchu', *Kino*, 8 December 1989, pp. 8–9.

83) kra., 'Jennifer Beals', *Kino*, 20 June 1989, p. 16.

84) mf., 'Hříšný tanec', p. 5; On titillation in Czechoslovak film marketing see Havel, 'Hollywood a normalizace', p. 60.

demands for entertainment, but that this Communist institution systematically embraced such fare as a means of promoting its own political interests.

The roles youth-oriented American imports played in the audiovisual culture of Cold War Czechoslovakia obviously exceeded those related to Communist cultural policy. Films like *THE STRAWBERRY STATEMENT*, *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER*, and *DIRTY DANCING* were also prominent in the cultural experiences of many Czechoslovak moviegoers. Examinations of the contemporaneous popular reception of these films and others like them, along with their construction and functions in popular memory, therefore promise to enrich the findings of existing studies of leisure under State socialism, which have concentrated on television, music, and on the practice of retreating to weekend cottages.⁸⁵ If this essay has identified how and why the CDF pitched youth-oriented American films to Czechoslovak audiences, new research might consider how those audiences actually consumed and used them, and their recollections of such conduct. In so doing, such studies are likely to complement this essay's contribution to our understandings of American imports' places in cultural, social, and political life behind the iron curtain.

Films Cited:

All that Jazz (Bob Fosse, 1979); *American Hot Wax* (Floyd Mutrux, 1978); *The Cremator* (Juraj Herz, 1968); *Discopříběh* (Jaroslav Soukup, 1987); *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987); *Elvis* (John Carpenter, 1979); *Erste Liebe* (Maximilian Schnell, 1970); *The Firemen's Ball* (Miloš Forman, 1967); *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970); *Flashdance* (Adrien Lyne, 1983); *The Green Berets* (Ray Kellogg and John Wayne, 1968); *Hair* (Miloš Forman, 1979); *Holky z porcelánu* (English-language Translation: "Girls from a Porcelain Factory"; Juraj Herz, 1975); *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (Stanley Kramer, 1963); *Jak svět přichází o básníky* (English-language Translation: "How the World Looses Poets"; Dušan Klein, 1982); *Let's Spent the Night Together* (Hal Ashby, 1982); *Metráček* (Josef Pinkava, 1971); *Miami Vice* (Anthony Yerkovich, 1984–1990); *Můj brácha má prima bráchu* (English-language Translation: "My Brother has a Great Brother; Stanislav Strnad 1973); *O lžubvi* (English-language Translation: "About Love"; Michail Bogin, 1970); *Rebel without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955); *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977); *Sněženky a machři* (English-language Translation: "Snowdrops and Dabs"; Karel Smyczek, 1982); *The Strawberry Statement* (Stuart Hagmann, 1970); *Summertime* (Anthony Newley, 1971); *Televarieté* (1971–1998); *Tenderness* (Vlyublyonnye; Elyer Ishmukhamedov, 1970); *Trzeba zabić tę miłość* (English-language Translation: "To Kill Love"; Janusz Morgenstern, 1972); *Třicet panen a Pythagoras* (English-language Translation: "Thirty Maidens and Pythagoras"; Pavel Hobl, 1975); *West Side Story* (Gerome Robbins/Robert Wise, 1961); *Xanadu* (Robert Greenwald, 1980).

85) See Jiří Hoppe, 'Starosti pana Nováka. Každodenní život "obyčejného" člověka v šedesátých letech', *Dějiny a současnost*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2005), pp. 35–38; Blanka Činátlová, 'Invaze barbarů do české kultury: Antropologický rozměr domácího umění', in Petr A. Bílek and Blanka Činátlová (eds), *Tesilová kavalérie. Popkulturní obrazy normalizace* (Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2010), pp. 154–165; Jiří Knapík et al. (eds), *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* (Praha: Academia, 2011).

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SUMMARY

“If not for their Artistic Merit then their Capacity to Connect with People”:

Czechoslovak Communists, Late Cold War Cultural Policy, and Youth-oriented American Films

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This essay examines the Czechoslovak State Film Company's (CSF) handling of youth-oriented American imports including *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (1955), *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER* (1977), and *DIRTY DANCING* (1987) in the late Cold War period. From an analysis of cultural policy statements, press coverage, and promotional materials, the essay argues that this organization's Central Film Distributor (CFD) framed such films in four historically situated ways reflecting changes in Czechoslovak Communist Party cultural policy: blaming parents for student unrest, demonizing American capitalist democracy, undermining subversive indigenous subcultures, and suggesting the liberalization of the cultural sphere. The authors posit that these approaches were rooted in important social and political developments of the late 1960s and were informed by conditions characterizing the period in which they were widely adopted. To date, historians have emphasized the concerns European claims-makers expressed about youth-oriented American fare in the second half of the twentieth century. By contrast, the case of the CSF and the CFD not only develops understandings of this organization, but also reveals that some European elites drew fairly positive conclusions about this type of film.