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## Risk and Trust in State-Socialist Co-Production Practice

*DEFA-Barrandov Collaborations of 1970s and 1980s*

In 1969, the Babelsberg group of *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) greenlighted the children's film *Adventure with Blasius* (1974), an adaptation of Werner Bender's novel *Messeabenteuer 1999* (1956), it initially envisaged as a wholly German project. Having reviewed early versions of the film's script, DEFA requested Czechoslovakia's Barrandov studios provide a scriptwriter to revise a draft penned by Fred Rodrian and Gerhard Holtz-Baummer. Barrandov turned to Milan Pavlík, who had specialized in such fare since the early 1950s.<sup>1)</sup> DEFA would itself later recruit the Czechoslovak director Václav Vorlíček to helm *Adventure with Blasius* in a decision clearly motivated by his work on the commercially and critically successful fairytale *Three Nuts for Cinderella* (1973). However, when Vorlíček reportedly fell ill, Barrandov elected not to inform its German partners, much to their irritation.<sup>2)</sup> And so, in December of 1973, Ota Hofman, the head of the Barrandov group responsible for children's films, composed a courageously impudent letter to the studio's notoriously arrogant chief dramaturge, Ludvík Toman.

DEFA is disconcerted from the situation [...] and I feel like Alice in wonderland as well [...]. Find out who should be blamed for the fact that nobody at DEFA knows Vorlíček withdrew from this project [...] Both you and I are losing *the trust* [my emphasis] of our foreign partners, which is so hard to earn. I demand an investigation into this situation, because other co-productions could be jeopardized this way — a situation in which I do not wish to find myself again. I have been made to feel deeply ashamed before our partners at DEFA; close friends with whom we wish to continue working.<sup>3)</sup>

1) Letter from Hofman to producer Z. Oves, 12 June 1974. Barrandov Studio a. s., archive (hereafter BSA), Prague, sbírka Scénáře a produkční dokumenty — *Dobrodružství s Blasiem*.

2) Vorlíček suggests this purported illness was nothing more than an evasion tactic used to derail the project. Author interview, 16 June 2015.

3) Letter from Ota Hofman to Ludvík Toman, 17 December 1973. BSA, sbírka Scénáře a produkční dokumenty — *Dobrodružství s Blasiem*.

Hofman's invocation of a trust so hard to earn yet so easily lost highlights the nature of the DEFA-Barrandov co-productions examined in this essay. In particular, it draws our attention to the roles risk and good faith played in the development of these projects. While focused on the concepts of risk and trust in the 1970s and 1980s, the conclusions I derive from such an analysis promise to be transferable to other international co-productions developed under State-socialism and potentially even to those of other film industries.

### Risk and Trust

Several scholars have considered the roles risk and trust play in the culture industries generally,<sup>4)</sup> with at least two focusing on film industries,<sup>5)</sup> and many more specifically approaching risk in this most financially unpredictable sector.<sup>6)</sup> For example, Chris Mathieu has suggested that trust "[...] secures the creative space within which one can use one's skills, experiment, learn, reflect, and thus develop as an artistic craftsman."<sup>7)</sup> While generally agreeing with his position, I would nevertheless like to offer two caveats. First, I would prefer to distance myself from the questionable notion that highly autonomous creative groups operated in East European film industries of the 1960s before they succumbed to a more bureaucratically controlled system of dramaturgy and production thereafter. In contrast to such a monolithic simplification, a consideration of risk and trust enables us to imagine these creative environments as multi-dimensional and multidirectional. To do so, is not to restrict ourselves to a hierarchical relationship between administrative bodies and subordinate creative personnel though, but rather also to recognize a horizontal axis characterized by business partners and ideological allies. In so doing, we may consider this relationship both in top-down fashion — from centralized managerial power toward practitioners at the periphery — and in bottom-up fashion, insofar as power is directed from dramaturgical groups toward functionaries. In the case of international co-productions, bureaucrats tailored their decisions to what they perceived as the professional values and ideologies of indigenous dramaturgical units, as well as to the ideologies of their overseas partners. Similarly, dramaturges took the values of their partners into account when proposing and developing projects. My second reservation concerns the terms "risk" and "trust" themselves, both of which I feel demand greater scruti-

4) Mark Banks, Andy Lovatt, Justin O'Connor and Carlo Raffo, 'Risk and Trust in the Cultural Industries', *Geoforum*, vol. 31, 2000, pp. 453–464.

5) Both related to Denmark. See Eva Novrup Redvall, 'Encouraging Artistic Risk Taking through Film Policy. The Case of New Danish Screen', in Mette Hjort (ed.), *Film and Risk* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), pp. 209–226; Chris Mathieu, 'The "Cultural" of Production and Career', in Petr Szczepanik — Patrick Vonderau (eds.), *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 45–60.

6) See for example Arthur De Vany, *Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2003); Michael Pokorny and John Sedgwick, 'The Financial and Economic Risks of Film Production', in Mette Hjort (ed.), *Film and Risk*, pp. 181–196.

7) Mathieu, 'The "Cultural" of Production and Career', p. 55.

ny and clarification. My use of these terms derives from the economist Oliver E. Williamson rather than the sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck.<sup>8)</sup>

### Calculativeness and institutional trust

It needs stressing that Williamson's influential discussion is still questioned on the basis that it excludes trust from social-science research, by restricting its use to "very special relations between family, friends, and lovers."<sup>9)</sup> For Williamson, instead of noncalculative trust, commercial relations within institutions are invariably characterized by calculativeness, whereby agents form subjective probabilities about others' actions.<sup>10)</sup> Therefore, if we are to apply Williamson's model to social-science research it is necessary to differentiate between trust as a non-calculative term and risk as a concept suited to calculative relations. Accordingly, I shall draw from Williamson the concept of "institutional trust" — a form of trust wherein large institutions provide safeguards which complement those specific interactions in order to support the actions of agents therein.<sup>11)</sup>

Williamson outlines three ways in which the term "trust" is used: Calculative Trust, Personal Trust, and Institutional Trust. The first of these, Calculative Trust does not represent a legitimate form of trust because it is underpinned by calculative relations derived from perceptions of risk; he suggests that to describe such conduct as trust would amount to a misuse of this term. Williamson proposes that Personal Trust pertains only to personal relationships liable to be destabilized by calculative behavior. Lastly, he employs the term Institutional Trust to refer to "the social and organizational context within which contracts are embedded".<sup>12)</sup> As the conduct that gives rise to institutional trust is shaped by and to the dynamics of the institution in which it is conducted, calculativeness once again surfaces, leading Williamson to subcategorize Institutional Trust in a number of ways including "societal-trust" and "political-trust". I employ such hyphenates because they provide us with an instructive means of examining the behavior of film industry decision-makers.

What is more, Williamson identifies six types of institution context in which such behaviors take place, each representing a hyphenated form of trust: societal culture, politics, regulation, professionalization, networks, and corporate culture.<sup>13)</sup> The levels of risk involved in each of these contexts are determined to a greater extent by the relative strength of the safeguards characterizing a given institutional environment. Thus, transactions viable in a strongly safeguarded environment may not be quite as viable in one less safe-

8) For an overview of approaches toward risk see Mette Hjort, 'Flamboyant Risk Taking: Why Some Filmmakers Embrace Avoidable and Excessive Risks', in Hjort, *Film and Risk*, pp. 33–38.

9) See Guido Möllering, 'Trust, Calculativeness, and Relationships: A Special Issue 20 Years after Williamson (1993a)', *Journal of Trust Research*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2014), pp. 1–24; Oliver E. Williamson, 'Calculativeness, Trust, and Economic Organization', *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1 (1993), Part 2, p. 484.

10) Williamson, 'Calculativeness', pp. 453–486.

11) See Möllering, 'Trust, Calculativeness, and Relationships', p. 3.

12) Williamson, 'Calculativeness, Trust, and Economic Organization', p. 486.

13) Ibid., p. 476.

guarded, because it would not be cost-effective to invest in the extra levels of governance needed. In this sense, levels of transaction-specific governance are determined by a number of factors:

### Societal culture

Contracts are jeopardized in a society supporting opportunism and condoning hypocrisy; a culture in which sanctions against strategic behavior are weak, legal action is difficult to enforce due to widespread corruption, and individuals have few reservations about engaging in opportunistic behavior. In such societies, transactions are invariably based on a model of immediate exchange/remuneration of goods and services, wherein no safeguards are needed to protect those involved. Generally speaking, the Czechoslovak film industry behaved opportunistically towards its western partners, as evinced by the myriad aborted projects between them.<sup>14)</sup> The low risk inherent in the immediacy of such transactions partly explains these industries' preference for commissions, rather than for co-productions, and reminds us why Barrandov was open to collaborating with western and particularly with US concerns in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>15)</sup> To say that societal culture under State-socialism was inclined toward opportunism is not to imply western producers did not also behave opportunistically.<sup>16)</sup> Rather, it is to say that business relations were subject to greater political and ideological demands in the Eastern Bloc countries than in the west, a situation which encouraged comparatively high levels opportunistic behavior shaped by perceptions of the political climate.

### Politics

The legislative and judicial autonomy from politics, which underwrites investor confidence generally, was clearly a weakness for State-socialist film industries controlled and intertwined with State and Party functionaries. Even though it is difficult under these circumstances to differentiate between societal culture and politics, we can nevertheless pinpoint some fairly explicitly formulated demands and bans. An illustrative example is provided by DEFA's attitude to potential partners in West Germany. DEFA was forbidden from partnering with companies from this country — and vice versa — at least until relations thawed between the neighbors in the 1970s. Thus, when the West German Westdeutscher Rundfunk was invited to join Barrandov-DEFA on *Three Nuts for Cinderella*, DEFA head Albert Wilkening told his Barrandov counterpart that, in spite of

14) See Pavel Skopal, 'Barrandov's Co-productions. The Clumsy Way to Ideological Control, International Competitiveness and Technological Improvement', in Lars Karl and Pavel Skopal (eds), *Cinema in Service of the State. Perspectives on Film Culture in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (New York — London: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 89–106.

15) In the first half of the 1970s, Barrandov provided services for a total of fifteen feature films and television series produced either by west European or American companies. Among these were *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (1971), *Slaughterhouse — Five* (1972), and *Operation: Daybreak* (1975). See report on Barrandov Studios activities in the period 1971–1975. National Film Archive, R19 – AII – 4P – 5K.

16) A telling example is Carlo Ponti's exploitation of a minor contractual oversight to withdraw financial support of *The Firemen's Ball* (1967). See Francesco di Chiara and Pavel Skopal, 'Příliš kruté pro Američany. Carlo Ponti, česká nová vlna a barrandovské koprodukce se západní Evropou', in Anna Batistová (ed.), *Hoří, má panenko* (Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2012), pp. 56–79.



a general agreement of cooperation between the two Germanys, nothing related specifically to cultural exchanges existed, making any such collaboration impossible.<sup>17)</sup>

### Regulation

The establishment of independent regulatory agencies increases trading confidence; however, under State-socialism the creation of such bodies required executive ratification, rendering them unfeasible. This is not to say that cultural functionaries abandoned the idea of establishing a regulatory body in the form of an annual conference attended by Soviet Bloc film industries. Yet, the body was anything but independent, as the Soviet Ministry of Culture exerted a profound influence on the conferences held in the late 1950s.<sup>18)</sup>

### Professionalization

A comparatively friendly business environment was fostered by high levels of professionalization in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Film studios had been operating for some time in these countries. As had film schools; Prague's FAMU opened in 1946, and its GDR counterpart the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen some eight years later. As well as stimulating interest among film industries on both sides of the Iron Curtain, this environment precipitated the co-productions between Barrandov and DEFA which ultimately begat twelve films from 1957 to 1985.

### Networks

Informal networks provide an important means of generating credibility. The specific networks which developed between the DEFA and Barrandov dramaturges responsible for children's films are elucidated below.

### Corporate culture

This form of institutional trust is mainly represented by informal structures that takes shape within a formal organization or institution, and which contributes to the viability of the latter by way of communication, by sustaining cohesiveness, and by the fostering of personal integrity, self-respect, and autonomy.<sup>19)</sup> Informal structures of this sort thrived under the bureaucratized system of dramaturge at Barrandov in the 1970s and 1980s, as exemplified by Hofman's group.

Although their conduct was expected to generate profit, this was by no means the only, or even the principal, force driving the rational agents operating in these institutional environments — directors, scriptwriters, dramaturge, and so on — nor for that matter the institutions of which they were a part, i.e. the film industry or a ministry of the State.

17) Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme DR 117/26495-2, A letter from Wilkening to Fábera, 31 July 1973.

18) See Skopal, 'Barrandov's Co-productions', pp. 96–98.

19) On the informal postwar organization of work at Barrandov see Petr Szczepanik, "'Veterans' and 'Dilettantes'. Film Production Culture vis-à-vis Top-Down Political Changes, 1945–1962', in Lars Karl and Pavel Skopal (eds.), *Cinema in Service of the State* (London — New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 71–88.

Prestige, as a means of building cultural hierarchies and indirect capital gain, was also a significant motivating force.<sup>20)</sup> At this point, it is helpful for us briefly to return to Hofman's letter cited in the introduction to this essay. Hofman's use of the term "trust" explicitly invokes his institutional environment, and, in more implicit terms, the low risk environment of his own dramaturgical group, which was characterized by high levels of professionalization, networking, and corporate culture. In other words, Hofman maintains a congenial relationship with the DEFA dramaturges Thea Richter and Christel Gräf, while serving as an important mediator between his studio and DEFA when collaborating on fairytales.<sup>21)</sup>

### The societal and political framework of international cooperation

The tradition and prestige of DEFA and Barrandov was shaken by changes in the political environment. Of particular relevance for DEFA was a 1965 conservative turn in East Germany known as "Kahlschlag"; for Barrandov a similar shift occurred after 1968, ushering in the period of so-called "normalization."<sup>22)</sup> Although these developments curtailed creative autonomy to some extent, they did not undermine the mutual interests characterizing the partnership between the two studios. Quite the contrary: where Barrandov remained attractive to DEFA as a service provider, even under normalization,<sup>23)</sup> Barrandov's management demonstrated greater interest in collaborating with an ideologically "trustworthy" DEFA than during the previous, comparatively liberal, years. Bonds between the two were in fact strengthened in the early 1970s by a politically motivated purge of talent at Barrandov. These developments helped to raise the profile of those surviving dramaturgical groups representing continuity with the previous decade; groups such as that responsible for children's films, headed by Ota Hofman.<sup>24)</sup>

20) See James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008).

21) For detailed analysis of the roles informal networks played in DEFA-Barrandov co-productions see Pavel Skopal, *Pragmatic Rapprochements: Cultural Transfer, Popular Cinema, and East German-Czechoslovak Coproductions, 1957–1985*, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, forthcoming.

22) 'Normalization' was a period in Czechoslovak history that followed the Soviet-led invasion of the country in 1968. The conservative turn in politics that normalization brought with it significantly affected cultural policy and film culture.

23) In a 1987 report about cooperation with socialist countries, the Department for International Relations at the Central Film Administration or Hauptverwaltung Film (hereafter HV Film) spoke highly of Barrandov's services. Report from March 3, 1988. HV Film, DR 1, sig. 14913. Other co-production partners proved less reliable. For example, in relation to *Faithfulness We Pledge* (1988), the Bulgarians were described as 'weak in organisation, especially as regards the working and living conditions.' See report from the director of DEFA Hans Dieter Mäde to the head of HV Film Horst Pehnert, December 14, 1987. HV Film, DR 1, sig. 14888.

24) On preceding DEFA-Barrandov co-productions and informal personal contacts between studio practitioners see Pavel Skopal, 'Reisende in Sachen Genre — von Barrandov nach Babelsberg und zurück. Zur Bedeutung von tschechischen Regisseuren für die Genrefilmproduktion der DEFA in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren', in Michael Wedel, Barton Byg, Andy Räder, Skyler Arndt-Bryggs and Evan Torner (eds), *DEFA international. Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), pp. 249–266; and Skopal, 'Pragmatic Rapprochements'.

A desire to maximize productivity exerted the greatest single influence on the revival of DEFA-Barrandov co-productions in the 1970s. Both partners believed they could increase output by splitting production costs. Moreover, DEFA was interested in sharing in the dramaturgical and screenwriting capacities of the Czechoslovaks, who were vastly experienced in making children's films. DEFA was also greeted warmly in Czechoslovakia. Personnel who had survived the aforementioned purges were now more than happy to work on children's fare as it meant they remained employed.

The strict bureaucratic control of both East German and Czechoslovak feature film production of the 1970s and the 1980s was intensified when it came to international co-productions. It was easier and safer for west European concerns to eschew formal co-productions with their East European counterparts while still hiring them as service-providers on certain localized aspects of production. Co-productions between East German and Czechoslovak studios, on the one hand, and, on the other, western concerns dropped significantly from 1970 to 1989. In this period, the two only worked on five projects with West Germany and one with a French partner. By contrast, DEFA collaborations with Soviet studios stood at eleven, followed by eight with Czechoslovakia, and smaller numbers with Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Mongolia, Vietnam, Austria, and Switzerland. Barrandov similarly focused its international co-productions on Eastern-Bloc partners: sixteen with the Soviet Union, eight with DEFA, seven with Poland, and three with Bulgaria, while it also sporadically partnered with studios in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Cuba, Austria, Tunisia, India, and Switzerland. In effect, the number of the partnerships between DEFA and Barrandov surpassed even those between Barrandov and individual Soviet partners, as the latter were scattered across a range of Soviet studios. Children's films and fairytales prevailed in the DEFA-Barrandov co-productions in the relevant period of 1970s and 1980s: *Three Nuts for Cinderella* (1973), *Adventures with Blasius* (1974), *The Island of the Silver Herons* (1976), *The Cat Prince* (1979), and *Magical Inheritance* (1985).<sup>25)</sup>

The political circumstances under which these Czechoslovak-East German co-productions were developed differed from those of the 1960s. 'Normalization' precipitated a renegotiation of the relationships between cultural producers in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. A liberalized Czechoslovak cultural policy, which had caused tension between these two countries, was redrafted by hardliners, ensuring it was now in synch with that of the GDR. The official ideological positions of both the East German and Czechoslovakia Communist Parties were thus closer than heretofore, removing a stumbling block to their cinematic partnerships. Furthermore, in 1970, Barrandov underwent major managerial and organizational changes, which saw it restructured in a manner similar to that which DEFA had inaugurated in 1966, with its six 'artistic groups' replaced by six dramaturgical groups and four production groups. The separation of the dramaturgical stage from production had at least two significant effects. First, the center of ideological control shifted to the dramaturgical level, and the dramaturgical unit was deprived of any significant responsibility under this bureaucratic system. Second, the system loosened

25) The other three being the period comedy *The Stolen Battle* (1971), the E.T.A. Hoffmann adaptation *The Devil's Elixirs* (1972), and the political drama *Theodor Lessing* (1973).

contacts between the dramaturgical group and the director, thus all but eliminating the possibility of personalized group styles of filmmaking.<sup>26)</sup>

If we follow the conditions for co-productions, as well as the institutional conditions of the projects and the risks involved for administrative and creative personnel, we can identify individual levels at which significant decisions on co-production projects were taken. At the most general of these, a space for co-productions was secured by agreements on cultural cooperation, usually of a fairly brief duration of two years and anything but specific in terms of what they outlined.<sup>27)</sup> Despite their generality, such contracts helped to construct an opportunistic societal culture, recalibrating the film industry's mandate in line with the political situation. Agreements between film industries were much clearer. Specifying and quantifying responsibilities, they typically covered international exchanges of filmmakers and functionaries who "shared experiences", attended premieres and film festivals, and promoted their nation's filmic output. Nevertheless, if the political climate was stable, the details of these agreements remained unchanged, and some of the activities stipulated therein abandoned (by my reckoning about one third all told). Major shifts in the political climate generally, and in the relationship between East Germany and Czechoslovakia or any other Eastern-bloc nations, led to differences of degree rather than kind when it came to such agreements. Thus, tension between Poland and the GDR in the early 1980s did not result in the termination of those agreements already in place, but rather in their being implemented with little fanfare; and in a series of planned exchanges of personnel being canceled.<sup>28)</sup> Regardless of the political climate, plans pertaining to co-productions tended to be sketched roughly, if indeed any details were spelled out at all. For example, a contract between the HV Film and Central Directorate of Czechoslovak Film for 1988–89, signed by Horst Pehnert and Jiří Purš, stipulated exchanges of personnel, but precious little else. Similarly, most of the agreements signed in the 1970s and 1980s between DEFA and Barrandov stipulated that co-produced films would receive gala premieres — assuming they mentioned co-productions at all that is.<sup>29)</sup> The generality of such agreements implies that principal preemptive control came from another source: instructions sent to dramaturgical groups by heads of the film industry or chief dramaturges. Following these instructions significantly diminished the risk of a project collapsing during a later phase of production.

26) This being said, in 1982, the system at Barrandov was partly reformed. The dramaturgical groups, which were largely isolated from production, were replaced by dramaturgical-production groups as units which included dramaturges and production managers. See Petr Szczepanik, 'The State-socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture', in Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (eds), *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 121; Dieter Wolf, 'Die DEFA-Spielfilmproduktion unter den Bedingungen staatlicher Finanzierung und Kontrolle. Zur Arbeit und Organisation der DEFA-Dramaturgie', in Klaus Finke (ed.), *Politik und Mythos. Kader, Arbeiter und Aktivisten im DEFA-Film* (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 2002), p. 112; Juliane Scholz, *Geschichte des Drehbuchautors in den USA und in Deutschland* (Ph.D. Thesis, University Leipzig, 2014), pp. 243–253.

27) For an overview of Czechoslovak-East German cultural agreements see Ivan Klimeš, 'Koprodukcje jako politikum. K pozadí vztahů mezi filmovými studii DEFA a Barrandov po potlačení Pražského jara'. An unpublished manuscript.

28) Report from March 3, 1988. HV Film, DR 1, sig. 14913.

29) HV Film, DR 1, sig. 14900.



### Risk-eliminating control

Problems tended to emerge when instructions delivered by decision-makers in this bureaucratic system failed to adhere to strict rules or to outline clear criteria, phenomena making them quite difficult to follow. As Marcela Pittermannová, a onetime dramaturge at the group responsible for children's films, recalls "in contrast to the 1960s, receiving approval of a script by a dramaturgical group meant nothing in the 1970s. The final word came from the new director general of Czechoslovak Film Jiří Purš. [...] who often clashed with Toman [...] because he was not as uncompromising as Toman."<sup>30)</sup> Unpredictability became a part of life at Barrandov when Toman was in charge of dramaturgy. When she was asked if it was possible to foresee which projects were likely to be green-lighted, Pittermannová responded thusly: "Quite the contrary. There were no rules. You had no idea what the outcome would be."<sup>31)</sup> In principal, Toman's initial approval of a co-production eliminated a substantial amount of risk for dramaturgical groups, with his approval serving a similar risk-elimination function for overseas partners as well. However, the unpredictable nature of project proposals that came from its likely rejection tended to be restricted to pre-production, with approved projects, especially co-productions, progressing comparatively smoothly once they were scripted. When she alerted DEFA's director general and chief dramaturge to the possibility of co-producing with Hofman's group, dramaturge Thea Richter was quick to stress Toman's receptive stance on such ventures.<sup>32)</sup> Similarly, HV Film pre-approved planned co-productions with Barrandov, as was the case with *Magical Inheritance* in 1985.<sup>33)</sup>

The comparatively low levels of risk enjoyed by dramaturges and filmmakers were a byproduct of bureaucratic top brass having little patience for risk taking. These opportunistic functionaries — chief dramaturges and the heads of the film industry — controlled the dramaturgical stage of production carefully so as to avoid ideological divisions, even if this meant limiting commercial potential by sticking to tried and true fare. Under these circumstances, creative opportunities only opened up for: the dramaturgical groups who relied on a shared vision, or one side supporting the perspective of the other.

### Barrandov's Children's Film Group: a pocket of continuity and trustworthiness

Produced by Barrandov's Children's Film Dramaturgical Group and DEFA's Roter Kreis and Berlin, fairytales and children's films represented the most reliable, commercially successful East-German-Czechoslovak co-productions of the 1970s. The Children's Film Dramaturgical Group was one of only two groups to boast high levels of continuity following the purges enacted during Normalization. After its previous head was made persona

30) Štěpán Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění. Počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov (1968–1973)* (Praha: Academia, 2011), p. 314.

31) Ibid., p. 313.

32) November 11, 1977. BArch, DR 117, sig. 29433.

33) See correspondence between Mäde and Pehnert, HV Film, DR 1, sig. 14864.

non grata during this draconian period, the group was run by Hofman until 1982, then by the writer Stanislav Rudolf from 1982 to 1984, and finally by Pittermannová until 1990.<sup>34)</sup> The regularity and stability of his group's co-productions suggest that, despite his own concerns, Hofman experienced lower levels of risk than those typically characterizing State-socialist co-productions of the period. This stability in part hinged on the exportability of fairytales, whose tales of good and evil unfolding in non-national fantasy space were seen to resonate cross-culturally.

In 1985, Roter Kreis reactivated its dealings with Barrandov when it co-produced the fairytale *Magical Inheritance* with the Jan Vild-run Dramaturgical-production Group 6. While this project was generally successful, no plans had been put in place for a sequel. Instead, the terms of the agreement for this film stipulated Barrandov co-produce *Iron Jack* (1987), albeit with DEFA in full creative control of the project. However, Jan Vild's dramaturgical group objected to the film's script, feeling it boasted excessive symbolism and insufficient humor. Although such squabbles had erupted on earlier co-productions, this particular power-struggle took place in altogether different circumstances. The Barrandov dramaturgical group involved was no longer headed by the savvy and influential networker Hofman, and, this time, DEFA head Hans Dieter Mäde refused to allow his partners to amend the script. DEFA would effectively produce the film without Czechoslovak assistance, because Mäde believed "the two concepts were incompatible".<sup>35)</sup> The once prolific cooperation between DEFA and Barrandov was thus discontinued by a decision made at a mid level of the dramaturgy's hierarchical structure represented by chief dramaturges and heads of studios; neither from a lower level represented by the practical dramaturgy of individual units nor from a higher level comprised of ministerial- or Party-controlled bureaucratic dramaturgy.<sup>36)</sup>

As the aforementioned letter from Hofman to Toman indicates, Hofman's group was eager to co-produce with DEFA; however, its motives for doing so were less creative than financial, relating as they were to the promise of bigger budgets, reliable staff, and attractive shooting locations. Indeed, the only time his dramaturgy did not wield full control over a project, Hofman had been disappointed with the resulting film, *Adventures with Blasius*.<sup>37)</sup> By contrast, he and his German partners had both expressed their satisfaction with the fruits of Barrandov's creative control.

The central dramaturgy, on the one hand, and the dramaturgical groups, on the other, drew upon distinct criteria to evaluate the commercial potential and risks of their co-

34) While all four newly established production groups were headed by experienced producers who had belonged to earlier creative groups, just two of the six dramaturgical groups were headed by experienced dramaturges — the second being the group led by Miloš Brož, which handled *The Stolen Battle* with the Roter Kreis Group. See Štěpán Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění*, pp. 146–151.

35) See letter from Mäde to the director of Barrandov studios Jaroslav Gürtler, April 1, 1987, BAArch, DR117, 28960.

36) For a definition of these three levels of State-socialist dramaturgy see Szczepanik, "The State-socialist Mode of Production", p. 123.

37) "This innovative script offering young people an exceptional science fiction film", he bemoaned, "has been co-opted by a type of humor that is not our own and is performed by child actors whose skills fall short of their Czechoslovak peers." Letter from Hofman to the producer Z. Oves, 12 June 1974. BSA, file 'Dobrodružství s Blasiem'.

productions. Barrandov head Miloslav Fábera insisted that a “dramaturgical, realizational and financial explanation” was needed to justify the co-production of *Three Nuts for Cinderella*. With basic costs covered, an experienced production team in place, and commercial potential looking robust, Fábera was reticent to share revenues with an obviously interested DEFA without good reason.<sup>38)</sup> Knowing DEFA firmly backed children’s films, Barrandov’s Hofman and Pittermannová would return from Babelsberg proudly reporting that “support for Czechoslovak children’s films was once again expressed by DEFA, which is looking to attract Czechoslovak scriptwriters and directors working in this field for co-productions and even for East German projects. DEFA is especially interested in Ota Koval, who could obviously make countless films for it [...].”<sup>39)</sup>

Rather than admiring DEFA for its talented scriptwriters and directors or for its financial acumen, Barrandov saw this studio as a trusted partner and above all else as ideologically credible. The institutional trust derived from such perceptions made it easier to initiate projects like *Theodor Lessing*. This film’s DEFA-written script prompted the conservative Vojtěch Trapl, head of Barrandov’s dramaturgical group, to suggest to Toman that, in spite of obvious weaknesses, it “would help the East German film industry, which was far better at grasping clear ideas than subtle artistic forms.”<sup>40)</sup> Hofman capitalized on DEFA’s reputation when seeking approval to co-produce *Three Nuts for Cinderella*, emphasizing the benefits of partnering with an “ideologically trustworthy studio.”<sup>41)</sup> However, when DEFA proposed collaborating on a joint project a few months later, Hofman dismissed *Blue from the Sky* (*Modré z nebe*) as “a chaotic piece”, leading DEFA to withdraw its proposal without complaint.<sup>42)</sup>

## Conclusion

The analysis conducted above suggests that the most persistent and successful series of co-productions between DEFA and Barrandov benefited from high levels of shared institutional trust. This trust was rooted in professionalization and the corporate culture of the Children’s Films dramaturgical group at Barrandov, as well as in the personal networks established with partnering DEFA groups. The main source of risk and uncertainty emanated from the central dramaturgy; from the central dramaturge and the head of studio. Co-producing projects with an ideologically trusted partner lessened the chance of unforeseen interventions and opportunistic behavior in the later stages of production, such as after

38) See Fábera’s letter to Václav Cajthaml, the head of the group for foreign commissions, September 18, 1972. NFA, R12 – AII – 2P – 8K. The reason for the co-production was the high budget not fully covered by Barrandov. See interview of Marcela Pittermannová with Václav Vorlíček, May 4, 2000. NFA, 322 OS, part 5.

39) Report from June 26, 1972. NFA, R19 – AII – 4P – 8K. In 1979 directed Ota Koval the DEFA — Barrandov co-production *Cat Prince*.

40) Letter from Trapl to Toman, 8 November 1971. BSA, file ‘Výstřely v Mariánských Lázních’.

41) See letter from Hofman to Toman, November 30, 1972. Barrandov Archives, file *Tři oříšky pro Popelku*. Toman agreed on such co-production. See Barch, sign. 29433, report on Hofman’s phone call to Christel Gräf.

42) Hofman’s report on a business trip to Dresden on January 22, 1973. Barrandov Archives, file *Tři oříšky pro Popelku*.

a project had been approved by senior bureaucrats as “politically trustworthy”. In reality, co-productions were more closely controlled during preproduction, because it was remarkably difficult in State-socialist countries to shelve a project already in production. By and large, in the 1970s and 1980s, central dramaturgies saw DEFA and Barrandov as politically reliable partners. The credibility of their partnerships, coupled with a comparatively low risk of failure in this sphere of production, stimulated a relatively long and commercially impressive run of films, which concluded with *Magical Inheritance*. It was at this point that DEFA’s central dramaturgy considered the partnership too risky on the grounds that it would invariably involve challenges to its own tastes and ideas. Before this, Barrandov had proved itself a credible partner. But this credibility, along with its predictability, was tied to the co-production of children’s films — the one genre over which Barrandov exerted significant control of content. And, while this did not represent an insurmountable obstacle for the DEFA dramaturgical groups networking with Hofman’s group, it turned out to be too ideologically risky a proposition for the studio’s central dramaturgy.

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## SUMMARY

**Risk and Trust in State-Socialist Co-Production Practice***DEFA-Barrandov Collaborations of 1970s and 1980s***Pavel Skopal**

The paper draws its attention to the roles risk and faith played in the development of co-production projects between the East German and Czechoslovak film studios, DEFA and Barrandov. While focused on the concepts of risk and trust in the 1970s and 1980s, the conclusions derived from such an analysis promise to be transferable to other international co-productions developed under State-Socialism and potentially even to those of other film industries. The proposed approach allows us not to restrict ourselves to a hierarchical relationship between administrative bodies and subordinate creative personnel though, but rather also to recognize a horizontal axis characterized by business partners and ideological allies. In so doing, we may consider this relationship both in top-down fashion — from centralized managerial power toward practitioners at the periphery — and in bottom-up fashion, insofar as power is directed from dramaturgical groups toward functionaries. My use of the terms „risk“, „trust“ and „calculativeness“ derives from the economist Oliver E. Williamson. For a sensible application of the concept in the social sciences is essential Williamson's demand to differentiate between trust as a non-calculative term, and risk as a concept suited for calculative relations.

The paper focuses on the period of the 1970s and 1980s, when Barrandov remained attractive to DEFA as a service provider, and Barrandov's management demonstrated greater interest in collaborating with an ideologically „trustworthy“ DEFA than during the previous, comparatively liberal, years. A liberalized Czechoslovak cultural policy of the 1960s, which had caused tension between these two countries, was redrafted by hardliners, ensuring it was now in synch with that of the GDR. The official ideological positions of both the East German and Czechoslovakia Communist Parties were thus closer than heretofore, removing a stumbling block to their cinematic partnerships.

Produced by Barrandov's Children's Film Dramaturgical Group and DEFA's Roter Kreis and Berlin, fairytales and children's films represented the most reliable, commercially successful East-German-Czechoslovak co-productions of the 1970s. They benefited from high levels of shared institutional trust. This trust was rooted in professionalization and the corporate culture of the Children's Films dramaturgical group at Barrandov, as well as in the personal networks established with partnering DEFA groups. In the 1970s and 1980s, central dramaturgies saw DEFA and Barrandov as politically reliable partners. The credibility of their partnerships, coupled with a comparatively low risk of failure in this sphere of production, stimulated a relatively long and commercially impressive run of films.