

Popular Culture and Subcultures of Czech Post-Socialism

Popular Culture and Subcultures of Czech Post-Socialism:

Listening to the Wind of Change

Edited by

Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka
and Jakub Machek

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LISTENING TO THE WIND OF CHANGE

ONDŘEJ DANIEL, TOMÁŠ KAVKA
AND JAKUB MACHEK

I.

Until now, scholars have successfully coped with the topics of popular culture and subcultures in most contexts of different countries of East-Central Europe following the fall of state socialism.¹ Nevertheless, the case of the former Czechoslovakia and later, the Czech Republic was usually left out. This neglect is striking, particularly in comparison with the rich repertoire of cultural studies of post-socialist transition in the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Poland and Romania. Even similarly sized countries such as the former GDR, Hungary and Bulgaria have attracted more interest from cultural scholars than the former Czechoslovakia and later, the Czech Republic.

Although it is more than a quarter of a century since the beginning of the transition, contemporary historians have not until very recently shown much interest in the process of transition from state socialism to a post-

¹ In order to frame the debate, let us mention here at least some of these works. Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Catherine Baker, *Sounds of the Borderland, Popular Music, War and Nationalism in Croatia since 1991* (London: Sage, 2010). Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999). Chris E. Hann (ed.) *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002). Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies After Socialism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2002). Anikó Imre, *Identity Games: Globalization and the Transformation of Media Cultures in the New Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009). Denise Roman, *Fragmented Identities: Popular Culture, Sex, and Everyday Life in Postcommunist Romania* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003). Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

socialist version of democracy.² Also, the research of social sciences and humanities focusing on the Czech(oslovak) context is rather scarce. When authors focus on the late state socialism, it is quite common to simply add a short summary about the transition period, as a certain kind of bonus at the end of book. Such a simplified view and the repeated standpoint of many of these authors describe the first years of the 1990s as a period of building (or more accurately, restructuring) capitalism as a way from backwardness. Thus, their interest in post-socialist history ends with the split of the Czechoslovak state in 1993. For example, the current high school textbook of modern Czech history describes the first period after the changeover as one of enthusiasm and optimism, but with many unpredictable problems. Citizens had to deal with a new everyday reality. The early 1990s' fervour for new freedoms was channelled into the demands of a free market, unrestricted entrepreneurship and other neoliberal theory demands.³ There are only a few contemporary historians among Czech scholars who perceived the process of transition from the perspective of *longue durée*, as continuity with late socialism. Michal Pullmann wrote in the short reflection (of course) at the end of his book about late socialism, the unbroken formality of words justifying various values free of higher moralism. Even after 1989, this practice allowed one to live "a happy life" only to redress the obligatory words such as "socialism" and "planning" into "democracy" and the "market". It helped to rewrite the usual communication and to exclude all dangerous and extraordinary inhabitants (replacing the Roma and dissidents before 1989 with the Roma, homeless and migrants after 1989).⁴ Lenka Kalinová concentrated on the social and economic determinations of the Czech space that, according to her could not have been transformed into a "normal Western democratic model". She perceived the transition and its reforms as an ongoing process. She showed a deeply rooted egalitarianism and demand for social security among social groups threatened by unemployment as well as among older people, who displayed insecurity and doubts. She found optimism about future development only among the younger generation with a higher education and among the stratum of the

² We are aware of pregnant discussion on the relevance of the term "transition" in literature dedicated to post-socialism. Given the fact of our interest in popular culture, where we observe the above described more gradual changes than those in economy and in politics, we have decided to deploy this term.

³ Robert Kvaček, *České dějiny II* (Praha: Práce, 2002), p. 223.

⁴ Michal Pullmann, *Konec experimentu. Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (Praha: Scriptorium, 2011), p. 226.

affluent.⁵ The “Czech Oral History Centre” reflected the transition process in interviews with members of various occupational groups as the participating actors of history in the volume *Stories of (Extra) Ordinary Professions. Czech Society in the Age of So-Called Normalisation and Transformation*.⁶ They depicted post-Velvet Revolution continuities and discontinuities as seen by the members of different occupations (ranging from “power groups” of firefighters, soldiers and police officers to managers, waiters, female shop assistants and farmers). They offered descriptions of structural changes with the results of transition structurally similar to Kalinová’s.

Czech oral history is indeed one of the central disciplinary fields that produced the first pertinent studies devoted to the first years of the transition. This research focuses on actors of the revolution, former political elites and dissidents. Even if their work lacks important conclusions, it relativises the triumphalist narrative of an unproblematic transition to democracy and capitalism. Some publications described particular conditions of the transition in the first months after the Revolution. For example, author Lubomír Kopeček described the tradition of juridical continuity in Czech history’s defining moments as an emasculation of the radical tendencies affected by the transition.⁷ This continuity led to the creation of a tiny political spectrum and, despite the original demands of the overall change of leaders, the outcome was an easy adaption of the old elites to the new conditions and assertion of liberalism. Similarly, the triumph of the tiny liberal elite during the first post-socialist year was interpreted in the book by James Krapfl.⁸ He focused on the final victory of liberal tendencies over wider popular consent during 1990. According to Krapfl, we could describe the early post-socialism period as the defeat of popular meaning and the emergence of neoliberalism.

In his *Zone of Transition: On the End of Post-Communism* Boris Buden compared post-socialist Europe to a child who needs to be

5 Lenka Kalinová, *Konec nadějí a nová očekávání* (Praha: Academia, 2012), pp. 376-378.

6 Miroslav Vaněk and Lenka Krátká, *Příběhy neobyčejných profesí. Česká společnost v období tzv. normalizace a transformace* (Praha: Karolinum, 2014).

7 Lubomír Kopeček, *Éra nevinnosti. Česká politika 1989-1997* (Barrister & Principal, 2010), p. 328.

8 James Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou. Politika, kultúra a spoločnosť v Československo po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009), English version *Revolution with a Human Face. Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

educated.⁹ In the eyes of Western hegemonic discourse, its inhabitants were capable of overthrowing the authoritarian regimes but completely incapable of adapting to the international reality and as such “acted like children”. Buden convincingly depicted the role of international advisors in the creation of new capitalism in post-socialist Europe. On the contrary, Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal highlighted in their article “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism” that a transnational network of Eastern European and American economists existed during state socialism and it unanimously decided on rapid adoption of a neoliberal model during the fall of state socialism.¹⁰ Bockman and Eyal insisted on the fact that this theory exchange was a dialogue based not necessarily on a bilateral model consisting of a Western author and an Eastern recipient but in fact there had been an existing dialogic system since the 1920s and 1930s, when the transnational debate on socialist economic calculation began.

David Harvey commented in his *Brief History of Neoliberalism* that the way to victory to a capitalist “Washington consensus” in East Central Europe was, however paved through a series of previous implementations of neoliberal economies. Specifically, these occurred; in Chile after 1973, in New York City after its 1975 fiscal crisis, in the United Kingdom after 1979, in the United States after 1981, and simultaneously to Central Eastern Europe but on a different quantitative as well as qualitative scale in China after 1989.¹¹ It might also be added at this point that the *tournant de la rigueur* of the Mitterrand government’s compromise with the neoliberal form of capitalism occurred in France in 1983. The Soviet *perestroika* started after 1986, when capitalism in general and its consumerist symptoms in particular deeply penetrated the Soviet Union and its satellites and immediately gained high prestige, especially in contrast with the socialist economies often lacking even the basic goods. Ironically enough, most of the goods, products and services that Eastern European would-be-consumers so eagerly worshipped came from the Federal Republic of Germany, a country that even in the 1980s and 1990s still conserved some of the Welfare state (*Wohlfahrtsstaat*) benefits and as such was heavily criticised by many Eastern European Thatcherites. As

⁹ Boris Buden, *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

¹⁰ Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal, “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism”, *American Journal of Sociology* 2 (2002): pp. 310-352.

¹¹ David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Michael Burawoy and János Lukács noted in their fabulous anthropological report from factories in socialist Hungary during the 1980s, the capitalism-driven dream of upward mobility in the global order was held together by a conviction that the one and only reason for this economic backwardness was the isolation of state socialism.¹²

In the context of the Czech Republic, post-socialism is described by economists and particularly by social scientists through the processes of liberalisation, restructuration and privatisation.¹³ These resulted in formations of urban poverty pockets as well as in structurally handicapped regions. Together, these processes could possibly be analysed through the optics of the formation of a new divide and the end of a predominantly egalitarian society. The Czech economy underwent a rapid “large privatisation” of the state-controlled industry in two waves (in 1992 and 1994) as well as a parallel “small privatisation” of service companies and “restitutions” of properties nationalised during state socialism. Due to the weight of the late socialist informal economy, these processes were preceded in many cases by the political changes of 1989/1990 and could be depicted in Marxist terms as a new “primary accumulation”. Its results can be observed in shifts of the class structure and in the new dichotomies that started to arise in the narratives of Czech society. For example, these were dichotomies such as central/peripheral regions and winners/losers in the post-socialist transition.¹⁴

Whereas the turning point between the late state socialism and the early post-socialism in the Czech case can, unlike some other East European countries, be quite clearly identified through the political changes of 1989/1990, the main milestones of Czech post-socialism are much less clear. Several events could be identified as a turning point. For instance, there is the rise of the pragmatic part of the Czech political elites represented by Václav Klaus, materialised through the split of the Civic forum (*Občanské fórum*) in 1992 and the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993. The first symptoms of the Czech economic crisis became apparent in the autumn and winter of 1996/1997 resulting in the unpopular “packages of budgeting cuts” (*balíčky úsporných opatření*). Moreover, there was a series of strikes such as the first general strike post-November

¹² Michael Burawoy and Janos Lukacs, *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹³ Vlasta Šafaříková et al., *Transformace české společnosti 1989-1995* (Brno: Doplněk, 1996).

¹⁴ Martin Myant, *The Rise And Fall Of Czech Capitalism. Economic Development in the Czech Republic Since 1989* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 2003).

1989 taking place in February 1997, although these were limited to the railway sector.

The material conditions of Czech post-socialism were presented by the economist Lubomír Mlčoch, who convincingly mapped out the relative decrease/increase of the average salary, comparing the late state socialism (1988) with two years of late post-socialism (1996 and 1999). Whereas builders earned 104.2% of the average pay in 1988, this was only 92.6% in 1996 and 78.6% in 1999. Doctors remained more or less on the same level (147.5% in 1988, 157.9% in 1996 and 168.3% in 1999) and lawyers were on an even better pay scale (152.4% in 1988, 199.9% in 1996, no data in 1999) and financial managers were the clear winners (195.8% in 1988, 332.0% in 1996, no data in 1999).¹⁵ The clear losers of the post-socialist transition were manual workers with a low education; the winners were members of the educated elite such as lawyers and economists. The wages of professionals with high social capital such as doctors and teachers show relative stagnation. Besides, a new class of profiteers of the late socialist and post-socialist grey economies was produced. This was often highlighted in the liberal media that put a particular emphasis on favouritism of collaborators of the former secret police. However, more targeted and balanced research should be carried out in this field. The building of the Czech “market economy without adjectives”, as described by the popular minister of finance and the face of the Czech economic restructuring, Václav Klaus, had not much to do with its ideal types as described by Friedrich Hayek and other theorists linking the market economy with a self-conscious civic society. Critiques of Klaus described his theory put into practice as a “vulgar liberalism”, “inverse Marxism”, expressing reserved feelings towards a “secular version of protestant ethics”. Despite being a country where, before 1990 95% of all properties were in the hands of the state, Czechoslovakia decided to become a privatisation leader of East Central Europe through its pragmatic leaders in the early 1990s.

However, in the early 1990s in Czechoslovakia and later, the Czech Republic not everything could be entirely explained to contemporary Czech society through economy. The country underwent a non-violent “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989 as well as the “Velvet Divorce” of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1992-1993, which was often contrasted in a positive manner to the blood-stained disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Dissident playwright Václav Havel was

¹⁵ Lubomír Mlčoch, Pavel Machonin, and Milan Sojka. *Ekonomické a společenské změny v české společnosti po roce 1989 (alternativní pohled)* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze – nakladatelství Karolinum, 2000): p. 267.

elected president by the last parliament of the Communist dictatorship in late December of 1989. In his new function, he welcomed international first-class politicians as well as post-1968 global “counterculture” artists (Frank Zappa, Lou Reed and Mick Jagger, to mention only a few names) to Prague Castle. Havel deployed a highly problematic concept of “apolitical politics”, drawing on the ideology of “Czech humanist tradition” and hailing the mythicised historical figures of Jan Hus, Jan Comenius and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.¹⁶ The Czech euphoria was reinforced by generally positive signals from Western Europe and the United States. The Czechs, for at least a while, felt again (as after 1918, 1945 and 1968) that they were a “chosen nation” and feeling themselves to be the most Western of all of the Eastern European nations. They also felt the most welcomed by the West and after 1990 began to look down on their East Central Europe neighbours.¹⁷ This dominant narrative of the first half of the 1990s started to erode with the first economic downturns. The first recession came in 1991-1994 and an even deeper crisis occurred in 1997-1998, along with all the negative societal impacts such as unemployment, criminality, and drugs.

There are only few studies in regards of the Czech transition and its changing society. Philosopher Martin Škabraha suggested the concept of a state without society. Inspired by Thatcherism, the roots of this concept reach into the post-socialist, economic and cultural transition and are applied to late socialism in Czechoslovakia. Similarly to Pullmann, Škabraha understands the continuity with late socialism as that of establishing hegemony of right-wing parties with non-linear development during the first years of the transition. The research of the Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Science deals with the constitution of political parties and with the formation of ideology during early post-socialism. Two volumes described the historical continuity of establishing the process of new ideology and the formation of new political parties. The first volume was published in 2009¹⁸ and described, among other things, the appearance of Czech nostalgia for communism and ideological patterns taken from history. One of its conclusions was that the November-December 1989 revolution should only be understood as a symbolic date for civic society and that the real political turnover

¹⁶ Ernest Gellner, “The Price of Velvet: Thomas Masaryk and Václav Havel”, *Czech Sociological Review*, 3 (1995), 1: pp. 45–57.

¹⁷ Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social transformation* (Cambridge, England, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Adéla Gjuríčová and Michal Kopeček, *Kapitoly z dějin české demokracie* (Praha-Litomyšl: Paseka, 2009).

should be set in 1992, when Havel's doctrine of non-political politics was defeated. The other volume concentrated on the establishment of political parties founded in the period of late post-socialism, during the political crisis related to the fall of the Czech government in 1997.¹⁹

Other studies also focused on the legacy of state socialism. The French historian François Mayer described the Czech discussions regarding communism after the fall of state socialism as a part of the continuing political struggle for power. She described lawsuits against particular perpetrators and she found no consensus on the meaning of state socialism as such.²⁰ Yet another fitting example of a narrative analysis concerning conflicting communist and anti-communist mythology of anti-communist fighters (considered as either heroes or terrorists) during the transition period is Josef Švéda's book *Mašín's Myth*. Švéda's analysis of socialist and post-socialist narratives is careful and in-depth, however the conclusions of his study confirmed the dominant ideological encoding of Mašín's story.²¹

The literature regarding the transition of media after 1989 is much more substantial. Jan Jiráček and Barbara Köpplová depicted the change of the media landscape after the reintroduction of freedom of speech and of private entrepreneurship. Together, these led to the broadening of genres and publishers as well as to the superficiality and tabloidisation of the press.²² Denisa Kasl Kollmannová examined the content analysis of the Czech tabloid and women's magazines revealing changes in love and partner discourse. She found that the transitional period was symbolised by the narrative model of Harlequin romance novels used as a marketing tool to enhance the sales rates of the media.²³ In accordance with the aforementioned high importance of TV series during late socialism, post-socialist TV series production was also probably the most frequently researched area of recent Czech popular culture. The studies that are the most informed and interwoven with the present global media discussions are those by Irena Reifová and her colleagues. They studied the reruns of

¹⁹ Adéla Gjuričová et al., *Rozdělení minulosti* (Praha: Knihovna Václava Havla, o.p.s., 2012).

²⁰ François Mayer, *Češi a jejich komunismus* (Praha: Argo, 2009).

²¹ Josef Švéda, *Mašínovský mýtus* (Praha: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2012).

²² Jan Jiráček and Barbara Köpplová, "Mass media and Czech society: interpreting media transformation after 1989" in *Média dvacet let poté = Media Twenty Years Later*, ed. Jan Jiráček, Barbara Köpplová and Denisa Kasl Kollmannová (Praha: Portál, 2009), pp. 46-55.

²³ Denisa Kasl Kollmannová, "Transformace mediálního systému. Romantizace mediálních obsahů a komodifikace lásky v mediálních obsazích", in *Média dvacet let poté = Media Twenty Years Later*, ed. Jan Jiráček, Barbara Köpplová and Denisa Kasl Kollmannová (Praha: Portál, 2009), pp. 134-148.

socialist TV drama series with the emphasis on the audience²⁴ (more about studies concerning audience, memory and nostalgia in Machek and Pišová in this volume). Reifová and her colleagues also analysed the glocalisation of the global phenomenon telenovela *Ugly Betty*.²⁵ The authors considered the post-socialist Czech egalitarian adaptation as a depiction of the newly arrived capitalism and a utopian land, where everything that went wrong would eventually return to its healthy and strong grassroots. A reflection of Czech society in Czech feature films was analysed by Jan Čulík²⁶, Petra Dominiková²⁷ and Radim Hladík.²⁸ Short but important and inspirational essay was written by Jiří Fligl, in which he describes the tendency of a significant part of post-socialist Czech cinematography as the Czech variant of exploitation films. This essay can be seen as a retrospective definition of a new genre.²⁹

Frequently researched field concerns also the theme of subcultures. In particular, this field flourished after 2010 by the production of a generation that echoed its own subcultural backgrounds. Some of them focused on the situation of musical subcultures in the context of post-subcultural theories.³⁰ Other studies opened up new topics about violence and subcultures,³¹ the confusion of the subcultural ideology of punks and

²⁴ Reifová, Irena. "Rerunning and 'rewatching' socialist TV drama serials: post-socialist Czech television audiences between commodification and reclaiming the past", *Critical Studies in Television* 4, No. 2 (2009): pp. 53-71.

²⁵ Irena Reifová and Zdenek Sloboda, "Czech Ugly Katka: Global Homogenization and Local Invention", in *TV's Betty goes global: from telenovela to international brand*, ed. Janet McCabe, and Kim Akass (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), pp. 189-205.

²⁶ Jan Čulík, *A society in distress: the image of the Czech Republic in contemporary Czech feature film* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

²⁷ Petra Dominiková, "We Have Democracy, Don't We? Czech Society as Reflected in Contemporary Czech Cinema", in *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, ed. Oksana Sarkisova, and Péter Apor (Budapest : Central European University Press, 2008), pp. 215-244.

²⁸ Radim Hladík, "Traumatické komedie: Politika paměti v českém filmu", *Sociální studia* 1 (2010): pp. 9-26.

²⁹ Jiří Fligl, "New Yorku a Libni zdaleka se vyhní" *Cinepur* 68 (2010)

³⁰ Marta Kolářová (ed.), *Revolta stylem. Hudební subkultury mládeže v České republice* (Praha: Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství (SLON), Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2011).

³¹ Ondřej Daniel, "Násilí československé mládeže na konci státního socialismu. Bezpečnostní rizika a téma společenské kritiky", in *Populární kultura v českém prostoru*, ed. Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka, and Jakub Machek (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), pp. 274-290.

skinheads after the turnover³² and described Czech subcultures as simultaneously post-socialist and post-subcultural.³³ Other approaches were introduced in the field of security studies.³⁴ Further, ethnographic research developed themes of specific Czech subcultures that were less influenced by the regime changeover, such as the (sub)culture of tramping, military recruits and children.³⁵

The topics concerning transition are more often studied by sociologists as, compared to historians, as they analyse the more recent changes in society and life style. This research was instigated in the middle of the 1990s to describe the Czech transition.³⁶ Sociologists tried to explain the changes of the state functioning and its politics in relation to the labour market, social and family policy, the monetary system, education, health care, and international migration.³⁷ These studies depicted the differences compared to Western Europe. The basic point of comparison was the socio-economic quality of the social structure and the proximity of socio-economic indicators to Western states. Jiří Šafr³⁸ analysed the 2004 census data and described the relation between social stratification, life style and taste that resulted from the post-socialist transition.

Another well researched area in the field of Czech post-socialism is gender studies. Such studies analysed the changes in the societal recognition of gender roles, their continuity and the small discontinuities with the socialist times.³⁹ Feminism and its uneasy path to acceptance to

³² Hedvika Novotná, “Punks and skins united? Souvislosti proměn vztahů punkové a skinheadské subkultury v Československu, respektive České republice”, in *Populární kultura v českém prostoru*, ed. Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka, and Jakub Machek (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), pp. 249-261.

³³ Marta Kolářová, “Hudební subkultury mládeže v současné ČR – postsubkulturní či postsocialistické?”, in *Populární kultura v českém prostoru*, ed. Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka, and Jakub Machek (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), pp. 232-248.

³⁴ Josef Smolík, *Subkultury mládeže. Uvedení do problematiky* (Praha: Grada, 2010).

³⁵ Petr Janeček (ed.), *Folklor atomového věku. Kolektivně sdílené prvky expresivní kultury v soudobé české společnosti* (Praha: Národní muzeum, 2011).

³⁶ Petr Machonin, *Social Transformation and Modernization. On Building Theory of Societal Changes in the Post-Communist European Countries* (Praha: Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství (SLON), Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 1997).

³⁷ Zdeněk Nešpor R. and Zdeněk Večerník (ed.), *Socioekonomické hodnoty, politiky a instituce v období vstupu České republiky do Evropské unie* (Praha: Sociologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, 2006).

³⁸ Jiří Šafr, *Životní styl a sociální třídy: vytváření symbolické kulturní hranice diferenciaci vkusu a spotřeby* (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2008).

³⁹ Jacqui True, *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism: The Czech Republic After Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

the common discourse of Czech society is a concern of Jiřina Šmejkalová.⁴⁰ Moreover, Libora Oates-Indruchová⁴¹ observed the obvious stereotypical depiction of women in outdoor advertising.

The topic related to consumption as the one of the most important areas of the societal and economic change post-1989 somehow stimulated less interest from scholars. There was only one study published, by Michaela Pyšňáková and Barbora Hohnová about the individualisation of the young generation through everyday consumption.⁴² Other fragments from a mosaic of the Czech post-socialist transition were added by other disciplines. In particular, the ethnographic work by Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation*, published in 1996, is worth paying attention to. Czech-English social anthropologist Holý investigated the Czech mind-set, its changes and continuities in the first post-socialist years. His ground-breaking study is perceived as unsurpassed so far and as such, inspired further studies about continuity. For example, perceiving the borders and the neighbouring states after 1989 was continuous with the limited Little Czech man's code of equality⁴³ and the continual satisfaction of abundance of food.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jiřina Šmejkalová, "Framing the Difference: 'Feminism' and Plebeism in the Czech Media in the 1990s", in *Mediale Welten in Tschechien nach 1989*, ed. Jirina van Leuwen (Otto Sagner, 2006).

⁴¹ Libora Oates-Indruchová, "Žena na ulici: (Stereo)typické reprezentace žen v současné velkoplošné reklamě v České republice", in *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 1 (1995).

⁴² Michaela Pyšňáková and Barbora Hohnová, "Od monolitické masy k neomezenému individualismu? Význam spotřeby v každodenním životě 'mainstreamové mládeže'", in *Sociologický časopis/ Czech Sociological Review* 2 (2010), pp. 257-280.

⁴³ Muriel Blaive and Berthold Molden, *Hranice probíhající vodním tokem. Odrahy historie ve vnímání obyvatel Gmündu a Českých Velenic* (Barrister & Principal, 2009); Blaive, "Malý český člověk před a po roce 1989 v Českých Velenicích", in *Populární kultura v českém prostoru*, ed. Ondřej Daniel, Tomáš Kavka, and Jakub Machek, (Praha: Karolinum, 2013), pp. 24-28.

⁴⁴ Ben Passmore and Susan Racine Passmore, "Taste and Transformation: Ethnographic Encounters with Food in the Czech Republic", in *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 21/1 (2008): pp. 7-41.

II.

Whereas the change of the political and economic environment was rapid and rather facile, the transmutation of the society - especially the shared values, beliefs and everyday practices, i.e. the mindset of individuals - was a rather slow and gradual process. This may be illustrated not only through the different strategies of public sphere privatisation that had been observed even before the turn of state socialism, but also in the deeply conservative worldview of many Czechs during the late state socialism and following the victory of liberal democracy and the capitalist mode of production. The Czech consumer-oriented (neo)liberal/conservative axis was supplemented by the overall verbal interest in the public sphere that cannot be understood only as a product of the changes of 1989/1990 but also as a result of previous vivid debates of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which had a surprising impact in Czechoslovakia, partly isolated by its rigid Stalinist official line from the West and from the changing East.

In order to study Czech society during the post-socialist transition period, the authors of this book relied on everyday popular culture as it is understood within cultural studies. Popular culture was thus considered as everyday culture of the general public encompassing mainstream culture as well as its subcultural counter-narratives. On the one side, such popular culture referred to the traditional patterns of culture in given times and spaces (preserving folk culture beside the newly developed national and socialist mediated cultural production). On the other side, it simultaneously became consciously fashionable and globalised. During the transition era, it served the general public as a tool of grafting new political and societal conditions onto enduring meanings and values. Hence, popular culture can be perceived as both a mirror of and a participant in the slow and gentle process of the transition of Czech society. In order to analyse the gradual societal change, the aim of this book is to study the transitional period in a wider scope, from late socialism to the post-2008 economic crisis. This transitional period research can help one to better understand the role of popular culture in different political regimes and societies as well as its role in establishing new models of societal and economic organisation.

This book is based on the concept of popular culture as a field of ideological battle, where the shifting hegemony is negotiated as a certain common interpretation of the world. In Gramsci's conception, there is a flow of dominant meanings in every culture, which in certain moments attempts to achieve dominance. Hegemony is perceived as a process of

creation, maintenance and the reproduction of these authoritative meanings – ideologies and practices. Due to continuous negotiation, created as an amalgamation of a variety of aims and wishes into a common interpretation of the world, this cultural and social unity is formed, serving as the basis for widespread social approval of the ruling group.⁴⁵

An analysis of certain elements of Czech popular culture is hence used to show both the variable and the more durable beliefs and values that influence behavioural patterns as well as the reception and adaptation of gradual economic, political and legal changes. These beliefs are not only inspired by developed capitalist societies but are also proposed and imposed by them. An important question of post-socialist societal and cultural research is the role of Western global culture during the post-socialist and late socialist periods together with the persistence and autonomy of former state socialist and national/traditional cultural practices. The “*longue durée*” of the Czech national ideologies embodied in popular culture of the late socialist and previous periods can be seen in the persistence, hybridity, transmutation and resistance of local cultural practices that are in conflict with Western global culture related to the formation of new post-socialist beliefs, values and identities. Thus common questions to all authors are linked to the continuities and discontinuities of post-socialist popular culture, mentalities and society during the period of late state socialism.

During the era of Czechoslovak state socialism, the communist regime dealt with popular culture in different ways. Throughout the initial period of the Stalinist regime, popular culture was considered as harmful and the regime tried to eliminate both the popular and the elite culture. This was thought to be best achieved by displacing them with the development of a new, unifying culture for everyone: socialist realism, consisting of a mix of the Soviet pattern with folk and 19th century national culture.⁴⁶ However, the attempt almost faded entirely during the thaw (the period of less restricted attitudes in the late 1950s and 1960s) and popular culture developed in ways mostly similar to those in Western societies (e.g. rock ‘n’ roll music, TV shows).

Following the official line of the Czechoslovak Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of 1968, the authorities relied on popular culture and restricted consumerism in order to create people’s acceptance of the status quo, rather than to force them to follow the renewed regime

⁴⁵ Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 2004), pp. 84-85.

⁴⁶ Pavel Janáček, *Literární brak: Operace vyloučení, operace nahrazení, 1938-1951* (Brno: Host, 2004), p. 63, p. 229.

enthusiastically.⁴⁷ Most significant for the situation of the 1970s and 1980s was the escape to “a private domain”. Although people still had to participate in some socialist rituals and ceremonies, the pivot of their lives was their private activities.⁴⁸

Political stability was achieved by submitting to the demands of the private sphere and by the resignation of any attempt to mobilise people in building socialism. This improved living standard was promoted as an achievement of socialism. The subdued interest in any political or economic alternative to the existing system, similarly described in the Reagan⁴⁹ and Thatcher era and more recently in the period of post-democracy, enabled prosperity as a symbol of the fulfilment of life and brought strong stability to the Czechoslovak regime after 1968.⁵⁰

The main popular cultural phenomena of the so-called “normalisation” period were TV series. They were carefully planned, approved and controlled by the ideological mass media boards of the Czechoslovak Communist Party’s Central Committee, gaining widespread popularity among Czechoslovak citizens. In order to attract a wide audience, TV series dealt mostly with family and interpersonal relationships, but they were also prepared to be in line with then current propagandistic needs. Highly popular series showed the socially acceptable set of values, ways of solving problems and efficient modes of behaving within the society of “real socialism” (which were not in conflict with the authorities). Hence, these TV series can be apprehended as a certain guide to a successful life in late socialist society as they offered everyday instructions, ideas of how to understand the surrounding world and proposed demanded consensual meanings and a system of values.⁵¹

Consequently, the new post-Velvet Revolution regime attempted to create a new hegemony. It had to introduce new cultural production promoting new ideas and a new understanding of the world and of the developing changes, demonstrating a new set of values appropriate for life in new conditions. Thus, the attempt of new post-revolution elites to

⁴⁷ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: the Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 86-87, 122, 125.

⁴⁸ Jakub Machek, “The Counter Lady as a Female Prototype: Prime Time Popular Culture, in 1970s and 1980s Czechoslovakia”, *Media Research/Medijska Istraživanja* 16/1 (2010): pp. 31-54.

⁴⁹ Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways: The Chata, the Tramp, and the Politics of Private Life in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia.” in *Socialist Spaces. Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, edited by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2002), pp. 123-140.

⁵⁰ Holy, pp. 33-34.

⁵¹ Machek, pp. 35, 42.

establish a new political and economic policy supported by the majority of citizens was related to the sharp shift towards the Western influence, which was thought to replace the socialist traditional and “outdated” national culture (upon which late socialist popular culture was based). The public and cultural space of the early 1990s was predominantly occupied by a stream of Western products, supplemented with the slowly emerging Czech adaptation of global patterns as well as reminiscences of the suppressed cultural boom of the 1960s. Global (or Western⁵²) cultural practices and products were seen as symbols of the need for change and the most suitable tools of “westernizing” post-socialist societies. Broadly accepted products of Western popular culture were shortly adapted in the local contexts and were combined with enrooted meanings and values. The biggest stars of the normalisation of popular culture disappeared for a certain period of time and rapid and undisturbed development towards the West was anticipated.

The idea of moving toward a Western democratic society and related capitalist free market economy, the so-called “comeback to Europe”, was promoted through the mentioned instant flow of Western cultural (and other) products. Western and westernised cultures were meant to attract citizens to the new economic and social possibilities and guide them towards cultural adaptation and changing conditions. The early post-socialist hegemonic consensus led by urban elites was based on an overall orientation towards the West⁵³. In order to make the Czechoslovak Republic a European country, an overall change of society was demanded and the request of its citizens to acquire proper Western values and attitudes was indirectly formulated. The inclination to local, socialist and national culture was often presented in the mainstream media as the incapability to adapt oneself to the new conditions, or as a sign of backwardness. The “bad taste” of the audience was seen not only as a sign of a lower-class status but also as a symptom of post-communist mentality inappropriate in the quickly westernised Czech society. According to Bourdieu’s concept of distinction, non-globalised taste labelled as nostalgic and obsolete was used to distinguish the urban elites (who participated in the economic development) from the rural and small-town lower classes (whose post-revolution expectations were mostly unfulfilled).

⁵² The global trends tended to be recognised and labelled as Western during 1990s, as the opposition to previous orientation of Czechoslovakia (economic, political and cultural) towards the East. Also, the use of the word “Europe” means Western Europe or the European Union — e.g. the popular slogan: “Return to Europe.”

⁵³ See the articles of Stanislav Holubec and Josef Švéda in this volume.

Following the early turbulent years of Czech post-socialism, the societal consensus about Western-orientated development slowly eroded as a consequence of the uneven development and gradual disillusion of significant parts of Czech society. Also, the proven national and conservative popular culture, characteristic and related to the normalisation period (the period of the renewed 1970s and 1980s socialist regime), steadily reached the mainstream media and the interest of broader audiences. The first economic crisis of 1997-1998 and particularly the most recent crisis of 2008-2013 further deepened the disillusionment with the often largely idealised and in many cases misconceived notion of the “West”. Part of this disappointment included the Western liberal/conservative ideology, cultural practices and products.

Paradoxically, the comeback to the so-called normalisation culture started first as an ironic memorisation of the odd, already antiquated and almost forgotten campy late socialist songs, films and TV series (from the point of view of young city dwellers). Nevertheless, they soon became a flagship of expanding private audio-visual media (most notably the popular Czech songs on radio station *Impuls*, the Saturday TV show on the TV channel *Nova* and re-runs of TV series on the TV channel *Prima*). Only the most conservative genres, regarded as outdated and rural even in 1980s, brass music and its modernised varieties, which can be characterised by the German terms *Schlager* (Hit) and *Volkstümliche Musik* (folksy/folk-like music) gained renewed popularity from mainstream media (*Česká Muzika* record label, TV channel *Šlágr*). From the perspective of the 2010s, there is hardly any significant discontinuance in the gradual development from the 1970s.

The chapters of this book depict analogous development in the post-socialist period. As mentioned, the early 1990s were open to any changes, full of commercial and alternative attempts to bring something new to the cultural sphere. However, the clash of the local and global patterns settled relatively quickly. In some cases, the local traditions were stronger (as in the examples mentioned above) but in other cases the winners were the global influences, such as in the case of the comics (see Kořínek). Yet sometimes the result was a combination of both local and global influences, such as in the example of chick lit (see Kos). The post-socialist subcultures reflect the changes in the values of Czech post-socialist mainstream society as well as the translation to global cultural trends in the context of semi-periphery (see Charvát and Daniel).

III.

This interdisciplinary publication draws on a wide range of inspirations, reflecting the professional background of its authors – social and cultural history, literary science, sociology, media studies and anthropology. The scope of the monograph is to provide a well-balanced picture of the popular culture and subcultures of the given space and time by various case studies. Questions shared by all authors are linked with the continuities and discontinuities of post-socialist popular culture, mentalities and society during the period of late state socialism, as well as identifying the different mechanisms of “creating the Other” in popular culture and subcultures, reflecting on its own state socialist past.

The main aim is to show the diverse trajectories of late socialist (and older national) cultural practices and the related set of values and beliefs in new, transitory circumstances. Whereas the cited scholars emphasise the tendency to sustain everyday life in a more or less adapted form under new circumstances, the chapters and case studies of this book demonstrate a slightly different, more nuanced development.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on new and entirely transmuted cultural phenomena of the post-socialist period. Children, teenage and young adult culture as well as erotica can be seen among the most controlled fields of socialist culture, where the educational efforts of the communist authorities were the strongest. Thus, the post-1989 deregulation brought large changes in these areas. New cultural entrepreneurs felt the prospect of satisfying the enormous hunger of Czech consumers for once-scorned popular practices.

This is the case of comics, when the tradition of acceptable socialist comics and stories with pictures (“masked” para-comics) were quickly replaced by the Western style. Since they were unable to compete with the licensed and translated comics magazines of global origin, the Czech magazines tried to adapt the Czech tradition of artistic comics within the new publishing practice and to integrate foreign production. Pavel Kořínek’s study *From Barbánek to Smurfette (and back again)* focuses on the changes in the comics’ distribution and publication practices in Czechoslovak children’s magazines between the years 1990–1995. He demonstrated their quest for maintaining and widening their readerships in the new conditions of the free and open market, when the editorial staff attempted to implement several different content-related strategies. Although children’s comics expanded over these years both in genre and themes, and a lot of foreign-based material was introduced, these magazines encountered grave difficulties in subsequent years due to the

lack of experience on the part of the staff and their inability to adapt to the new situation quickly enough.

The case of pornography is similar, to some extent. Whereas comics were partly tolerated in artistic and educational forms before 1989, pornography was officially suppressed and human sexuality was considered technocratically as an aspect of the socialist citizen's health. In her chapter *Naked Democracy. Eroticism and Nudity in Czech Public Space after 1989*, Adéla Gjuričová described the dramatic breakthrough of Western consumerism and the growth of commercialised sexuality and public nudity after 1989. These were analyzed in relation to a number of other phenomena: Czech popular liberalism, an absence of (or open opposition to) gender analysis and feminist critique (derived from the opposition to the authoritative socialist emancipation discourse) and most strikingly, the characteristic and dominant market narrative. This blend managed to bind sexuality, including its commercial exploitation, to Western democracy, the free market and anti-communism.

The genre of popular women's fiction also kept its popularity during late socialism, gaining a new shape appropriate for life in real socialism. The boom of reprints of interwar love stories in the early 1990s was superseded by the global production of romance novels (such as the most popular Harlequin edition). But it was later accompanied by a new alternative to popular women's fiction. So-called "chick lit" was the answer to the needs of the new generation of female readers, who were not satisfied with the non-authentic plots of existing popular women's fiction. In her chapter *Gender, Sexuality and Transitional Change in Czech Popular Women's Fiction*, Suzana Kos examined the key elements that can be recognised as relevant markers of the transitional society, such as the loss of identity, consumerism and the rise of new political structures. She also analysed the relevance of post-feminism in relation to Czech chick lit novels, due to their importance in the understanding of the way in which gender and sexuality appeared as the influencing elements of the distribution of power in a transitional society.

The second part of the book is dedicated to another phenomenon in relation to the regime's changeover; the necessity of the reversion of values and the meanings associated with different public issues. However, it is possible to observe that this reversion was only superficial and the foundation layers of meaning and values remained predominantly constant. This is because they were a part of historical collective memory shared and passed down through generations, in certain periods strengthened by ruling authorities, in others suppressed.

In his chapter *Post-Socialist Society and its Enemies. Perception of Russians, Slovaks and Germans in the Czech Weeklies* Stanislav Holubec demonstrated how the negative perceptions and concepts of certain nations transpired in the Czech public sphere. Negative stereotypes were shared, reproduced and to some extent even created by the Czech mass media. Given this fact, these stereotypes played an important role in the development of the new post-communist identity for Czechs who defined themselves as liberal and European. But the important role in the creation of negative stereotypes was played by historical memory (connecting the Germans to Nazism and Russians to communism) and European orientalism, as in the case of the Slovaks and Russians. In order to support the idea of Czech exceptionalism within the post-socialist world and their affiliation with Western Europe, these nations were situated outside of the “European civilisation”.

In contrast to these negatively perceived neighbouring nations, the United States became an almost ideal model of a developed capitalist state. Although communist authorities considered the USA as the main enemy of socialist development, representations of America as the land of freedom, democracy and prosperity were prevalent in the dominant prewar and interwar discourse of the Czech cultural elite. Such a positive perspective was excluded from official culture in the state socialist period during 1948-1989, but it survived in the unofficial culture and in common discourse. In his study *The Czechs Rediscover America. Representations of the USA in Czech Post-Socialist Travel Literature*, Josef Švéda analyzed the new, highly idealised representations of the United States praising American liberal democracy and the “free market”. It emerged in the Czech medial discourse and the contrasting narratives about the rigid and bureaucratic central planning system under which the Czechs “were forced” to live. In these narratives, the USA model became the one to be followed in the transition period to a capitalist economy.

The process of shared evaluation of competing regimes is also a theme of Jakub Machek’s and Ina Pišová’s research described in the chapter “*Written and shot for us, young ones.*” of *Collective Memory and Meaning Attribution in a Case of Watching Late Socialist and Early 1990s TV Programmes by Contemporary Young Audience*. Their aim was to study the effect of the late state socialist and post-socialist TV programmes on a young audience, who had no direct experience with the late socialist nor the early transition period. They examined how their attitudes to the depicted content were formed, to what degree their understanding was influenced by the encoded meanings and to what degree it was influenced

by an existing collective or family memory. The existing collective and family memory appeared to be the most important in the process of attributing meaning to the period programme watched. However, the authors also observed a rather strong influence of dominant discourse that was spread by the mainstream mass media and by educational institutions. This is because respondents from different social and regional backgrounds tended to produce similar narratives regarding recent history, even given their different backgrounds.

The third part of this book focuses on post-socialist subcultures. These became one of the most noticeable elements of the late socialist consensus disintegration in the 1980s, when subcultures developed as an expression of young radicals' dissatisfaction with both the authorities and society. However, under the new conditions the values and beliefs of the largest post-socialist subcultures such as the punks and skinheads happened to be similar to those shared by the mainstream society. Thus, paradoxically, these subcultures could be considered in part as the carrier of deeply embedded mindsets of Czech society.

Ondřej Daniel's chapter *Limits of a Post-Velvet Normality: Subcultures, Violence and Class in Late 1990s Czech Society* shows how the limits of the acceptable and normal were negotiated during the second half of the 1990s. This was demonstrated through the examples of three subcultural events referred to in the mainstream media. Values, feelings and the attitudes of opinion makers in relation to the studied events de facto coincided with bourgeois ethics. They were adapted to a new reality of a predominantly xenophobic society struggling with post-egalitarian traumas and complexes that were based on much deeper structures than changes from the parliamentary Right to the Left or vice versa. The tolerant hegemony of the late 1990s mass media was overcome by a subversion of the conservative "common sense" against the liberal and tolerant residuum of the „Velvet revolution“ and by an open adoption of deeply conservative motives in the mainstream politics.

In the final chapter, *Nationalism, Anti-communism and "Traditional values" in the Non-political Branch of the Skinhead Movement* Jan Charvát analysed "apolitical" skinheads' discourse. Although they verbally dissociated themselves from any political issues, notions such as nationalism, "traditional values" and anti-communism were echoed rather strongly. Their political attitudes were masked as "common sense" and "traditional morals". Charvát's text focuses on the spread of certain political issues, which have the ability to create scope to take extreme right-wing positions in the apolitical skinhead scene. The author describes how nationalism is perceived and interpreted by the skinhead subculture.

He further analyses the role of anti-communism and “apolitical” skinheads’ inclination towards deeply conservative values.

I.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM BARBÁNEK TO SMURFETTE (AND BACK AGAIN): 1989–1995 CZECH CHILDREN’S AND YOUTH MAGAZINES— COMICS’ AND PICTURE SERIALS’ CHANGES IN EDITORIAL PRACTICE AND PUBLICATION STRATEGIES

PAVEL KOŘÍNEK⁵⁴

The year 1989 caused an earthquake in Czechoslovak periodicals as well as in children’s and youth magazines. Studying these tremors in relation to political, societal and editorial change, this article employs methodological approaches of close reading and comparative and quantitative analysis. In the context of the Czech media history, children’s and youth magazines have thus far been overlooked by scholars. This field of study still lacks a complete historical overview, such as a dictionary of magazines and collections together with detailed characterisations and interpretations of individual magazines and complex periodical systems (in operation before the Velvet Revolution).

In this article, I will describe several underlying tendencies that I believe played a major role in the transformation of the Czech children’s periodical market and its publication strategies. The explanatory focus on comics and picture serials, together with their quantity, origin and the position in the magazine were, as I argue below, considered as arguably the most up to date, modern and Western and therefore had the “magnetic type of content” at that time. Altogether, this emphasis has allowed me to describe the major transformative changes in the wide variety of comics

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