

CHAPTER I

Inspirations, Opportunities: Cultural and Historical Contexts

Marching In Step, Swimming Against the Current: The Troubled History of the Czech Avant-Garde

The story of Surrealism has been told many times and in numerous languages. Yet that standard history comprises only one story, a story in which the Surrealist movement is rendered synonymous with a small group of avant-garde artists and intellectuals who lived in Paris between the wars. Famous émigrés from Germany or Spain generally comprise a few of the lead characters, though that is as far as the coverage of Surrealism's international dimension goes. The story of Czech Surrealism has never received a comprehensive telling in English, and in so far as the Czech movement is even mentioned it is in the guise of a subplot complementary to the larger narrative of 'true' Surrealism. For this reason the names of the Czech avant-garde's key representatives are much less well-known than they should be. Yet Czech Surrealism can claim 'authenticity' on two fronts, as not only was it closely linked with the French movement, it also grew organically out of a native avant-garde. The persistence of the movement in the face of extraordinary pressures reflects how deeply rooted Surrealism is in Czech culture, but this persistence also belies a history that is complex and convulsive, marked by numerous upheavals, shifts and schisms. Once we take into account all its legacies and deviations, twentieth-century Czech Surrealism is revealed to encompass many different aesthetic and political positions: it has embraced both realism and abstraction, Marxist-Leninist utopianism and world-weary ideological scepticism. Sometimes the movement's practitioners have questioned the extent to which they are Surrealists at all, and for more than twenty-five years of the movement's history no self-titled Surrealist group actually existed.

The prehistory of the Czech Surrealist Group comprises an entire chapter in itself, and traces of this prehistory are still visible in Surrealist works of the

postwar era, as well as in a number of films influenced by the avant-garde. While Czech modernism in general can be dated back to around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the specific constellation of artists and intellectuals that would later comprise the Surrealist Group emerged, as did Western European Dada, out of the devastations – and transformations – of the First World War. This group, which, rather mysteriously, called itself ‘Devětsil’,¹ was founded in 1920, and after dabbling briefly with a self-consciously ‘primitivist’ style of art, it embarked upon the groundbreaking artistic programme of Poetism.² Like their French, German and Italian counterparts, the young men and women who comprised Devětsil had been radicalised by the war. Where the earlier Czech avant-gardes had displayed a contemplative, mystical tendency, Devětsil was as much a political movement as an aesthetic one. However, in contrast to the nihilistic, destructive mentality of Dada, Devětsil was optimistic and constructive, founded on positive principles of change rather than on mere negation. Furthermore, Devětsil was avowedly Marxist from the beginning, as is evidenced by its interest in the latest cultural developments from the fledgling Soviet Union. If the French avant-garde’s transition from Dada to Surrealism constitutes a dramatic shift in aesthetic, political and philosophical terms, then Devětsil’s own transition to Surrealism appears smoother. Karel Teige, the founder and chief spokesman of Devětsil, even felt that Devětsil had formulated the same essential ideas as the Surrealists, independently of and indeed before the French, with Teige’s first Poetist manifesto of 1924 appearing several months before André Breton’s first Surrealist manifesto.³

While Surrealism and Poetism are similar in many ways, there are also, as suggested in the introduction, significant distinctions. Poetism aimed above all to be the artistic voice of modernity. Underpinned by Devětsil’s commitment to the emancipatory potential of technological progress, Poetist works delight in the modern metropolis and the new wonders of the industrial world. Yet Poetism is cheery and light-hearted, lacking in the violent, portentous qualities with which the Italian Futurists celebrated the same phenomena. Perhaps more than any other contemporaneous avant-garde movement, Devětsil was enamoured of popular culture, and especially of cinema, which fulfilled central criteria in being at once a ‘mass’ (and thus proletarian) art form and a technological innovation. Described by Teige as a

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1. Devětsil literally means ‘nine powers’, but it is also the Czech name for the butterbur, a plant believed to have curative powers.
 2. František Šmejkal, ‘From Lyrical Metaphors to Symbols of Fate: Czech Surrealism of the 1930s’, in Jaroslav Anděl (ed.), *Czech Modernism 1900–1945* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1989), p. 65.
 3. Ibid., p. 66; Karel Teige, ‘Deset let Surrealismu’, in *Surrealismus v diskusi, Knihovna Levé fronty*, Vol. 8 (Prague: Levá fronta, 1934), p. 11.

form of ‘modern epicureanism’, Poetism displayed a concern with sensuous experience that extended to the materials of artistic expression themselves. In the field of verbal art, Poetism waged war against the outdated concept of ‘literature’ and asserted the importance of the physical properties of words. The writing of poems was often a pretext for typographical experiment, and words were selected as much for their visual form as for their meaning. Given this preoccupation with words as objects, it is hardly surprising that Devětsil enjoyed close contact with literary theorist and linguist Roman Jakobson, who had been involved with the Russian avant-garde before settling in Czechoslovakia and helping found the structuralist Prague Linguistic Circle. It was in relation to Poetism that Jakobson first defined his notion of ‘poeticity’ (a notion that will be explored in the chapter on Švankmajer). Poetism was marked by a greater concern with artistic form than was French Surrealism, a concern manifested in a spirit of restless aesthetic experimentation: the so-called ‘picture poem’ (*obrazová báseň*) incorporated text into visual collages, once again underlining the physical dimension of words, and in his second Poetist manifesto from 1928 Teige proclaims his ambition of creating a ‘poetry of the five senses’ that would encompass a poetry of smell (‘olfactory poetry’), a poetry of taste and so on.

Unsurprisingly, Devětsil also harboured cinematic ambitions, and the numerous screenplays and proclamations about film written by the group suggest that a Devětsil cinema would have extended Poetist visual experiments in the fine arts: according to Teige the Devětsil screenplays’ ‘central interest was picture poetry, synthesis of picture and poem, set in motion by film’.⁴ To a large extent Devětsil’s vision of a ‘pure cinema’ stripped of narrative and literary elements anticipated later developments in the American underground film: a direct link is even provided by Alexandr Hackenschmied, a filmmaker affiliated with Devětsil, who would later emigrate to the United States and, under the name Alexander Hammid, collaborate with influential avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren. While various films did emerge from the Devětsil fold during the 1930s (including several feature films directed by the great experimental writer Vladislav Vančura, notably *On the Sunny Side* (*Na sluneční straně*, 1933) and *Faithless Marijka* (*Marijka nevěrnice*, 1934), the latter film scripted by, among others, Vítězslav Nezval and Roman Jakobson), a ‘Poetist cinema’ as such never materialised, thwarted by the predictable absence of sympathetic investors. Nevertheless, the avant-garde arguably infiltrated popular culture to a greater extent in Czechoslovakia than in other countries, not least through the medium of theatre. The avant-garde Liberated Theatre (*Osvobozené divadlo*), co-founded in 1926 by Devětsil member Jindřich

4. Karel Teige, quoted in Michal Bregant, ‘The Devětsil Film Dream’, in Rotislav Švachá (ed.), *Devětsil: Czech Avant-Garde Art, Architecture and Design of the 1920s and 30s* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), p. 72.

Honzl, first showcased the talents of the comic duo Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, whose act became extremely popular and who would go on to make a series of successful film comedies (*Your Money or Your Life* (*Peníze nebo život*, Jindřich Honzl, 1932), *Heave Ho!* (*Hey Rup!*, Martin Frič, 1934), and *The World Belongs to Us* (*Svět patří nám*, Frič, 1937)). The case of Voskovec and Werich (and that of their 1960s successors, Suchý and Šlitr) represents a minor fulfilment of Devětsil's ambitions of creating a new 'proletarian' culture that synthesised avant-garde and popular elements. Such cases might alternately be seen to suggest how the opposition between 'high' and 'low' cultures is a false one to begin with.

Devětsil's formal experiments were frequently linked to the attempt to portray and stimulate the 'inner life', and it is here that the aims of Poetism most closely approximate those of Surrealism, even if Poetism's methods were often quite different. Teige argued that by emphasising the sensuous and associative qualities of words over their denotative meaning, the poet could express the 'infrared and ultraviolet reality' of the unconscious.⁵ The artists Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen established 'Artificialism', a sibling movement to Poetism in painting. Typically made up of fluid, indefinable forms that seem to inhabit some subterranean level of the mind, Artificialist paintings were an attempt at 'the concrete rendering of nonsubstantive impressions, feelings, memories, and imaginings'.⁶ The Czech avant-garde did not fully embrace Freudian psychoanalytic theory until its eventual Surrealist 'conversion', which may seem surprising in view of many of Devětsil's preoccupations. Paradoxically, however, Teige's thought addressed the libidinal foundations of the imagination in a way that the puritanical Breton rarely did. Teige's proposal of an *ars una*, a modern form of *gesamtkunstwerk* that would unify the different arts, was based on his belief that the roots of the 'creative instinct' are to be found in 'the basic, life-giving and creative instinct *par excellence*, namely the sexual instinct'.⁷ Unlike Breton, Teige was uninhibited by conventional morality in his personal life and often bluntly biologicistic in his writing.⁸ In terms of sexual morality Teige was closer to a figure like the Soviet feminist Alexandra Kollontai, and the Eros he propounded not only winged but defiantly naked.

5. Karel Teige, quoted in Esther Levinger, 'Czech Avant-Garde Art: Poetry for the Five Senses', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (September, 1999), p. 514.

6. Šmejkal, 'From Lyrical Metaphors to Symbols of Fate', in Anděl, *Czech Modernism 1900–1945*, p. 70.

7. Karel Teige, 'Báseň, svět, člověk', in *Zvěrokruh*, No. 1, November 1930, p. 11.

8. See Jaroslav Seifert, 'On Teige: A Danse Macabre in Smíchov', in *The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*, edited by George Gibian and translated by Ewald Osers and George Gibian (North Haven, CT: Catbird, 1998), p. 230.

Poetism was a movement designed not to contribute another ‘ism’ to the history of aesthetics but to transform life itself, and it sought to do this in a manner at once more precise and more ambitious than that of French Surrealism. The reverse side of Teige’s anti-aesthetic stance was his desire to diffuse poetry into life, and the life of the collective rather than that of the cloistered few. Teige even imagined miraculous ‘magic cities of Poetism’, ‘which would be the site of entertaining mischief ... , the optical pleasure of colours and forms, the pleasure of hearing noise and sounds, in short the pleasure of all the senses in a carefree style’.⁹ Poetist culture was thus to contribute to the cultivation of the senses and the imagination. Yet the revolution in sensibility that Teige envisaged would need to be accompanied by political revolution, as capitalism deformed human beings’ sensual and emotional life, ensuring the domination of ‘the feeling of ownership’ at the expense of other ‘physiological and psychological feelings’.¹⁰ Poetism in fact comprised only half of Devětsil’s utopian vision. Immensely adept at absorbing and synthesising different artistic trends from all over the map, Teige appropriated Soviet Constructivism, whose principles would play the role of a rational complement to the anarchic Poetism. Constructivism’s watchwords are standardisation, innovation and anti-aestheticism; the Constructivist method would ensure the greatest possible rationalisation of work and production. Teige extended his concern with rationalisation into his architectural theorising of the 1920s and 1930s, although once again the desire for functionality and formal stringency is harmonised with a concern for beauty and the cultivation of human sensibilities. The Devětsil of the 1920s may largely be founded on the synthesis of oppositions, yet there are oppositions here that seem irreconcilable, not least the tension between the philosophical playfulness of Poetism and the staunchness, if not dogmatism, with which the Devětsil artists adhered to both Marxist–Leninist ideology and its representatives in the Czechoslovak Communist Party. When a group of Czech writers left the Party in protest over its ‘fractious terrorism’ and ‘immature fanaticism’, Teige, Nezval and other Devětsil figures lost no time in publicly condemning these ‘seven writers who used their literary names for a political attack against the party, which for us means life’.¹¹ Indeed, during the 1920s and early 1930s the Czech avant-garde maintained a better and closer relationship with the Party than Breton’s Surrealist group, which is at least partly a testament to the Czechoslovak Party’s cultural openness, relatively speaking of course, in the days before Socialist

9. Karel Teige, *Svět, který se směje* (Prague: Akropolis, 2004), p. 89.

10. ‘Báseň, svět, člověk’, p. 14.

11. ‘Spisovatelé komunisté komunistickým dělníkům’, ‘Zásadní stanovisko k projevu “sedmi”’, in Štěpán Vlašín (ed.), *Avantgarda: Svazek 3: Generační diskuse* (Prague: Svoboda, 1970), p. 47, p. 55.

Realist orthodoxy was established. The story of the Czech avant-garde in the twentieth century is ultimately the story of its relationship with Communist authority, and the course of Czechoslovak Communism can itself be traced in the ups and downs, the crises, redefinitions and resurgences, of the avant-garde's turbulent history.

In 1934 Devětsil reinvented itself as the Czech Surrealist Group, with many of the most important figures, including Nezval, Honzl, Toyen and Štyrský, retained from the earlier group. The immediate instigating factor for the formation of a Surrealist group was the close personal bond that Nezval had developed with André Breton, although Lenka Bydžovská suggests a number of additional, deeper factors for this transformation. In the political climate of the mid-1930s, 'the hedonistic poetry of Devětsil' was starting to seem 'anachronistic', and the avant-garde was becoming increasingly preoccupied by the depths of the human psyche at the expense of the external and rational.¹² Furthermore, Breton's own declaration of support for Marxism and the French Communist Party in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* from 1929 assured the Czechs, who had earlier criticized Surrealism's 'anarchist' tendencies, that the Surrealists held 'correct' political principles.¹³ Teige himself was initially reluctant to join the new group, no doubt partly out of feelings of 'rivalry' with Breton's group but also because of intellectual and artistic disagreements with Surrealism: for instance, he rejected at first the Surrealist practice of 'psychic automatism' (the transcribing of thoughts 'direct' from the unconscious), believing instead that artistic expression should comprise a synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements.¹⁴ Yet Teige later made his peace with Surrealism and would ironically become the movement's most prominent theoretical spokesman during the 1930s and 1940s, a role for which he would be persecuted when the Communists came to power.

Faced with the Communists' misunderstanding and distrust of Surrealism on the one hand and with Breton's notorious obstinacy on the other, the Czechs sought to mediate between the French Surrealists and the Communist Parties of both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Temperamentally as well as geographically, Teige and Nezval were well-disposed to reconcile Paris and Moscow. In his speech at the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, Nezval argued for the compatibility of Surrealism with revolutionary struggle, but to no avail: what the Czechs had envisaged as an opportunity for rapprochement was in fact the sounding of the death knell for cultural pluralism, as it was the 1934 Congress that announced the establishment of Socialist Realism as the one

12. Lenka Bydžovská, 'Against the Current: The Story of the Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1, Winter 2003, p. 2.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Šmejkal, 'From Lyrical Metaphors to Symbols of Fate', in Anděl, *Czech Modernism 1900–1945*, p. 66.

'official' aesthetic of Soviet Communism. Massively disappointed, the Czechs nonetheless clung to the scraps of comfort offered by the somewhat more open-minded approach to aesthetics propounded in Nikolai Bukharin's speech. Moreover, Teige and Nezval recognised the need for political unity in the face of fascism and maintained their conciliatory stance, though they must have recognised that this stance was almost entirely one-sided. Ever the synthesist, Teige even attempted the seemingly impossible feat of reconciling Surrealism and Socialist Realism. Teige argued that realist methods could acceptably be harnessed to the socialist cause in the USSR, where reality itself had been transformed into the 'positive human and social reality' of a 'classless society'. In the capitalist world, however, reality was still inimical to the socialist writer, and thus romantic and lyrical methods were called for in the propagation of revolutionary consciousness.¹⁵ For Teige, a solidarity of adjectives ('socialist') was more important than a solidarity of nouns ('realism').¹⁶

Yet the 'human and social reality' of the Soviet Union had itself become problematic by the mid-1930s. The death sentences handed out after the first Moscow show trials violated Teige's humanitarian principles, and in early 1938 the disillusionment with Soviet reality felt by Teige and other Surrealists embroiled them in a bitter quarrel with the increasingly Stalinist Nezval. A few days later Nezval tried, by means of an announcement in the press, to dissolve the Surrealist Group.¹⁷ The other members defied Nezval's unilateral gesture, and as a response Teige wrote the pamphlet *Surrealism Against the Current* (*Surrealismus proti proudu*, 1938), in which he unequivocally attacked Stalinist political and cultural practice. This internal crisis combined with the external fact of German occupation meant that Stalinism and Nazism had both conspired around the same time to crush Czech Surrealism. Yet they did not succeed, and even though the Surrealist Group 'proper' formally disbanded in 1942, Surrealist activity flourished throughout the years of occupation. Many defiant younger artists adopted the Surrealist creed: as Bydžovská writes, '[i]n the stifling atmosphere of the Protectorate, [Surrealism] represented, for the young generation, an alluring challenge to engage in free creative thought'.¹⁸ The years of war and occupation were no less fruitful for Slovak Surrealism, or, as it came to be known, 'Nadrealism' ('*nadrealismus*' in Slovak being a direct translation of the French term '*surréalisme*'). Having begun as the importation of a foreign model, an imitation of French and Czech sources, Nadrealism quickly become 'a thoroughly domesticated, genuinely Slovak, literary and

15. Karel Teige, quoted in Deborah Helen Garfinkle, *Bridging East and West: Czech Surrealism's Interwar Experiment* [doctoral thesis] (University of Texas, 2003), p. 66.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Jakub Sedláček, in Vítězslav Nezval, *Pražský chodec* (Prague: Labyrinth, 2003), p. 170.

18. Bydžovská, 'Against the Current', *Papers of Surrealism*, p. 9.

artistic phenomenon.¹⁹ The rural character of much Slovak Surrealist poetry, for instance, suggests the Slovak movement's independence from the Prague-centred (and -centric) Czech Surrealists.²⁰ Other distinguishing characteristics were a reliance on native folk tales, a greater predilection for the 'allegorical message' and a more romantic, 'literary' sensibility.²¹ Surrealism in fact became even more influential and important within Slovakia than Czech Surrealism was in its own national context, and that importance only grew 'during the period of the clerico-Fascist state of the 1940s'.²²

In many ways, the Czech Surrealism of the postwar years comprises a profound reinvention, both aesthetically and philosophically, of the earlier movement. By the time of the Communist takeover in 1948, many of the key players in the Surrealist movement of the interwar and Occupation years had either died (Štyrský), emigrated (Toyen, the poet Jindřich Heisler) or 'capitulated' to Stalinism (Nezval, Honzl). Teige maintained both his location and his avant-garde allegiances, only to be denounced by the new Communist government as a Trotskyist and relentlessly harassed by the secret police.²³ By 1951, however, a new group composed of younger Surrealists had formed around Teige. Following Teige's death that same year, writer and theorist Vratislav Effenberger assumed leadership, and the history of a new, substantially redefined Surrealism began in earnest. The attitude to Communist authority was now one of unequivocal hostility, with official ideology perceived as 'a vulgar pack of extinct and emptied-out ideas, discredited in a blindingly obvious manner by recent history and everyday events'.²⁴ To adapt to the present system was to forsake one's authenticity for a place in the cultural 'market' (the language of capitalism is here pointedly turned against state socialism, an indication that the new Surrealists' sympathies, for all their opposition to Stalinism and distrust of ideologies per se, remained broadly 'radical'). This antipathy was of course mutual, and the authorities denounced Surrealism as 'the Trojan horse of western imperialism'.²⁵ Indeed the Surrealists' determination to stay underground was something of a forced choice, as, for all but the most conservative of artists, collaboration with the system was not

19. Peter Petro, 'Dominik Tatarka: An Introduction to a Rebel', *Cross Currents 6: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1987), p. 281.

20. See Petro, 'Slovak Surrealism as a Parable of Modern Uprootedness', *Cross Currents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982), p. 230.

21. Petr Král, *Le surréalisme en Tchécoslovaquie: Choix de textes 1934–1968* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 60.

22. Peter Hames, 'The Film Experiment', in Hames, *Dark Alchemy*, p. 33.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Stanislav Dvorský, 'Z podzemí do podzemí', in Alan, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 114.

25. Král, *Le surréalisme en Tchécoslovaquie*, p. 62.

an option. The 'red future' anticipated by Devětsil had disastrously materialised, and the lyrical projection of a utopian future was exchanged for the laconic depiction of a dystopian present. The new Surrealism was mordant, satirical, full of 'black humour'; its muses are more Kafka and Louis-Ferdinand Céline than Breton and Nezval. Postwar Surrealism's key term was 'concrete irrationality', as the irrationality that had previously manifested itself in dreams and fantasies was now to be observed in the social and political systems of the real world. In the light of death camps, political prisoners and nuclear bombs, the artist could no longer retreat into a private realm of 'convulsive beauty'. The imagination was now valued most, it seems, as a means of uncovering the 'objective humour' of the social world, the irrational qualities of the real. Effenberger would later stress, however, that Surrealism's importance lay in its 'creative' character as much as in its 'critical' role.²⁶

While both Breton and Teige had tried to construct their own comprehensive theoretical systems, Effenberger rejected the idea that any such system could claim universal validity. For Effenberger, 'the break-up of the integrity of the world, the break-up of universal intellectual systems – or better said: the recognition of the non-existence of this unity, integrity and universality' meant that the only credible 'unifying perspective' could be provided by the 'core' of the individual's personality.²⁷ The emphasis was now on 'disintegration' rather than Teigean synthesis. In 1963 Effenberger and the other Surrealists relaunched their group under the new name 'U.D.S.' (appropriately, the name stands for different things, including '*útěk do skutečnosti*' ('escape into reality') and '*Už dost surrealismu!*' ('enough now of Surrealism!')), but they stressed that the new group did not constitute any unified 'artistic movement', only a 'system' by means of which 'individual opinion-related, creative and interpretive standpoints' could interact.²⁸ Effenberger's thought can be considered postmodernist *avant la lettre* in its rejection of totalising theories and narratives of utopian liberation: Effenberger considered the 'utopian gestures' of both Teige and Breton to have sprung 'from despair'.²⁹

The anti-doctrinal, anti-unificatory stance exemplified by Effenberger was all the more apt in that his 'official' Surrealist circle did not constitute the only attempt at negotiating the Surrealist legacy during the postwar period. The

26. See Effenberger's essay of 1966–1967, 'Variants, Constants and Dominants of Surrealism', quoted in Donna Roberts, 'Neither Wings nor Stones: the Psychological Realism of Czech Women Surrealists', in Patricia Allmer (ed.), *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* (Munich; Berlin; London; New York: Prestel, 2009), p. 75.

27. Vratislav Effenberger, quoted in Dvorský, 'Z podzemí do podzemí', in Alan, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 135–36.

28. 'U.D.S.', quoted in *ibid.*, p. 137.

29. Vratislav Effenberger, 'The Raw Cruelty of Life', in Matejka, *Cross Currents* 6, p. 442.

'Půlnoc' ('Midnight') circle, an alternative stream that boasted the participation of such writers as Egon Bondy, Bohumil Hrabal and Ivo Vodsedalek, offered an even more unorthodox response to Surrealism, and can be considered broadly analogous to the American Beat movement. Similarly to Effenberger's own, this group, while comradely, was loose, resistant to overarching self-definition. A number of artists from these circles even published manifestos or founded 'schools' of their own: Bondy's 'total realism', Vodsedalek's 'poetry of embarrassment', Vladimir Boudník's 'Explosionism', Petr Král's 'Fire Brigade Theatre' manifesto. Poet and psychoanalyst Zbyněk Havlíček stood outside both Effenberger and Bondy's circles, a (self-)isolated figure who had nonetheless belonged to the short-lived 'Spořilov Surrealist' group during the war. On Effenberger's testimony, Havlíček was distinguished by his more 'romantic', 'lyrical' conception of Surrealism and less qualified acceptance of Freudian theory.³⁰ A Czech version of Informel painting emerged in the late 1950s, overlapping directly with self-declared Surrealism via the involvement of figures like Mikuláš Medek and Josef Istler.³¹ Czech Informel can indeed be considered the visual analogue of the literary (or, as a stringent anti-aestheticism would dictate, anti-literary) endeavours of Effenberger, Bondy or Karel Hynek. Medek's painting, say, might be 'formalist' to an extent that these writers' works are not, comprising as it does a gestural, quasi-abstract art concerned with the 'imprint' of feelings, yet both the plastic and literary manifestations of the Surrealist-oriented avant-garde concern the materiality of the world, the obstinacy and opacity of 'brute facts', and the confrontation between subjective and objective worlds ('the mix of man and matter').³² Plastic art operates unavoidably on the real and concrete, but even in the Surrealists' verbal output a brute externality might manifest itself directly in transposed 'blocks' of everyday reality.³³ Such tactics can of course be related to the sense, voiced retrospectively by Effenberger, that social irrationality 'burst with a humour so objective that all you had to do was place it in front of a camera or on a stage for its rationalist shell to crack open'.³⁴ It is unsurprising that photography, a medium capable of both documenting the real world and investigating its material textures, flourished in postwar Czech Surrealism. With a few exceptions (albeit including a world-famous one in Švankmajer), the Surrealists were never permitted to extend their concerns to cinema, although Effenberger produced numerous unfilmed scenarios to match the unstaged plays he wrote with Hynek

30. Jakub Sedláček, 'Zbyněk Havlíček – podoby surrealistické metafory', *Slovo a smysl*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2004, p. 93.

31. Hames, 'The Film Experiment', in Hames, *Dark Alchemy*, p. 36.

32. Král, *Le surréalisme en Tchécoslovaquie*, p. 54.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

34. Effenberger, quoted in Roberts, 'Neither Wings nor Stones', in Allmer, *Angels of Anarchy*, p. 83.

(written for the flat sitting-room if not the drawer) and both he and Král indulged their interest in film with idiosyncratic, often brilliant, criticism.

The 1960s was the decade when avant-garde and Surrealist sensibilities temporarily secured a place in the mainstream, both in Czechoslovakia and internationally (although, as we shall see, this state of affairs is partly attributable to influences beyond those of the avant-garde itself). During this decade, the 'real' Czech avant-garde kept its distance from what it saw as meretricious appropriations of Surrealism, Dada or Poetism. It seems the Surrealists feared official acceptance as much as they had feared official persecution: in 1964 Surrealist writer Věra Linhartová wrote of the necessity of resisting absorption into the mainstream, and warned of the 'inner decay' that could result from 'the pressure of the public cultural market'.³⁵ On the other hand, the liberalisations of the 1960s did mean that Surrealist writing could be published and Surrealist art legally exhibited. The formerly beyond the pale Karel Teige received a kind of posthumous rehabilitation; a comprehensive republication of his theoretical writings was begun in 1964, although political events intervened before it could be completed. Another consequence of liberalisation was that provocative artistic practices new to the Czech context, such as performance art, took root during this time. In April 1968, the Czechs joined forces with the French Surrealists to issue a manifesto called 'The Platform of Prague', a tortuously worded but important document which upholds the contemporary relevance of Surrealism and the movement's commitment to non-totalitarian socialism.³⁶ Yet despite this manifestation of Surrealist solidarity, the French group disbanded shortly after the manifesto's publication (outliving its founder Breton by a mere two years). The Czech group continued under vastly more difficult circumstances: while the French had only a post-'Mai' waning of revolutionary energies to contend with, the Czechs had to face the harsh, and dispiriting, climate that the Warsaw Pact invasion unleashed. More enduringly, contacts were also established in 1968 with Slovak Surrealism, notably in the form of the young Slovak poet Albert Marenčin.³⁷ In 1969, with renewed repression clearly on the cards, Effenberger and his companions defiantly re-attached the name of Surrealist Group to their activities and

35. Věra Linhartová, quoted in Dvorský, 'Z podzemí do podzemí', in Alan, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 139.

36. Petr Král relates: 'the Prague group rediscovers in [the French] a hidden romanticism: almost overnight, from being sceptical and disabused dandies, we become, spontaneously, "leftists"' (Král, *Le surréalisme en Tchécoslovaquie*, p. 61).

37. According to Král, Marenčin was the first exponent of a Slovak Surrealism that could truly be considered the counterpart or twin of the contemporary Czech movement (ibid., p. 60). Marenčin also worked in the Slovak film industry, and the production group he ran with Karol Bakoš was responsible for, among other works, Uher's *The Miraculous Virgin* and Jakubisko's 1960s films. He thus constitutes one of the few direct links between Surrealism 'proper' and the movement's cinematic incarnations.

published the first issue of the journal *Analogon* (the second issue had to wait another twenty years). Czech Surrealism formally acknowledged its existence again at the very time when authority decreed that it should not exist.

Indeed, the repressions of the Normalisation period were no more effective in destroying the avant-garde than were those of the Stalinist period, and a broadly based cultural underground flourished throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ensuring exposure for its works through illegal exhibitions and Samizdat publications that were often printed in large numbers and to a professional standard. A principle of solidarity in opposition fused with diversity and an Effenbergerian ‘disintegratory’ spirit. The Surrealist Group itself emphasised collectivity in its creative practice during this period, devising a series of inter-subjective games and experiments (such as the famous ‘tactile experiments’). The avant-garde now achieved an oppositional role in the most concrete sense, through the alignment between underground writers, artists and musicians and the dissidents who founded the Charter 77 civil rights movement. The legendary band The Plastic People of the Universe, whose incarceration provided an initial impetus for Charter 77, routinely set Egon Bondy’s writings to their Zappaesque rock music: Surrealism was thus brought into direct conflict with the authorities and to the forefront of civil rights struggle. Arguably it was precisely the lack of official acceptance that enabled the Czech avant-garde to exist in such an ‘uncontaminated’ and closely-bound (though not repressively so) form. The fall of Communism and the arrival of free-market liberal democracy thus presented the most serious threat of all, and could have meant the dissipation or even death of Surrealism. Surprisingly, however, the group (now known as the Group of Czech and Slovak Surrealists) has continued to function at a modest level, and it remains as hostile to consumer capitalism as it once was to Stalinist dictatorship. Since Effenberger’s death in 1986, the group has had no chief centralising figure or leader, which seems like a logical culmination for a narrative that has passed from a rigorous intellectual and political unity through to a tolerant relativism.

Reform, Renaissance and Revival: Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and the New Wave

The broad assimilation of the avant-garde by the Czechoslovak culture of the Sixties reflects the artistic and intellectual flourishing of a society at once liberated and galvanised by a process of political reform. Just as Surrealism and Devětsil returned to the wider cultural consciousness, so other aspects of the Sixties artistic, philosophical and political culture involved the rediscovery of traditions suppressed, if not destroyed, during the Stalinist years. So many of the cultural and political developments of this period seem at first sight radically new: the youthful New Wave in cinema, the New Economic Model

that established an alternative blueprint for a state socialist economy, the political reforms, achieved or projected, geared towards infusing the Communist system with a certain level of democratic freedom and participation. Yet to a large extent the developments of the 1960s also comprise the regaining of a lost continuity. Not only was the world of arts and letters pervaded by a spirit of revival, but this decade also saw the rediscovery of the more liberal and democratic approach that had characterised Czechoslovak Communism in its early, prewar days.³⁸ Ironically enough, it was the loosening of political orthodoxies that enabled Marxism to live once more, to re-emerge as a dynamic, flexible human science and to find its roots again in national traditions and attitudes.

Yet Eastern Europe's period of political thaw did not begin particularly promisingly for Czechoslovakia. The stability of the Czechoslovak regime amidst the turmoil of the mid-1950s can be attributed perhaps above all to the absence of such large-scale public protests as would culminate in both Gomułka's 'Polish October' and the revolutionary government of Imre Nagy in Hungary. Meaningful reform of the system was also impeded by the involvement of Party First Secretary Antonín Novotný and other powerful figures in the excesses of the Stalinist years. Clearly these elements in the leadership reckoned that any attempt to address the crimes of the past or to establish greater political openness would have serious repercussions for their own positions. Nonetheless, minor gestures towards a thaw were made: a desultory investigation into the political trials of the period 1949–1952 began, against Novotný's wishes, and many political prisoners were quietly released. A degree of liberalisation occurred within academia and the arts, although even this modest thaw would be annulled in the late 1950s. Symptomatic of the conservative backlash was a film conference held in Banská Bystrica in 1959, at which a number of new films were attacked for their formalism, their insufficient 'optimism', and their general fixation on 'private life'.³⁹ Czechoslovakia thus passed into the 1960s a functioning Stalinist, or neo-Stalinist, state. In 1960 the country adopted a new 'socialist' constitution, which served both as an 'acknowledgement' that socialism had been successfully achieved, and as a means of giving Communist power a basis in law. Galia Golan describes the Constitution as 'a centralist document in which the party and the government were more intimately drawn together and the party declared "the leading force in society and in the State"'.⁴⁰

38. Vladimír Kusín, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia 1956–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 1–2.

39. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, pp. 35–36.

40. Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis 1962–1968* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 5.

The reform process thus did not begin in earnest until the early 1960s; it is often dated back to the 12th Communist Party Congress of 1962, which established a new commission for the investigation of the show trials, one that would offer a more intensive examination of the trials and would focus on the extended time period 1949–1954. While these investigations did not result in any prosecutions, a number of high-ranking Party officials lost their positions and were replaced by young, untarnished and mostly liberal successors. 1963 saw the beginning of debates about economic methods, prompted by the stagnation of the Czechoslovak economy during that year. The command economy system, in which directives were issued from the centre, was called into question both as an effective system of production and as the one pre-ordained form a socialist economy must take. The Slovak economist Eugen Loebel argued that central planning ‘was not a “law” inherent to socialist society’. Against the old Stalinist view that society was ‘objectively’ determined by such ‘laws’, Loebel asserted the more humanistic view that ‘socialism offered human beings the possibility to change things’ as they saw fit.⁴¹ (The rejection of determinism within the economic sphere can be seen as reinforcing contemporaneous developments within Marxist philosophy.) Another economist, Ota Šik, was charged with devising a new system of economic management.⁴² Šik’s ‘New Economic Model’, whose principles were accepted by the Party Central Committee in January 1965, involved restoring certain basic market mechanisms, granting a greater degree of autonomy to enterprises and offering rewards to the more successful enterprises. While the New Economic Model was only implemented in 1967, and partially at that, the attack on the old command structure had a significance that exceeded the economic sphere. Indeed the demand for economic reforms is often seen as the catalyst of the reform movement itself. Alfred French writes: ‘What ended as a movement for wide political, social, and cultural reforms started as a set of proposals designed to promote improved efficiency, balanced economic growth, and a better use of the country’s human and material resources’.⁴³ The call for economic decentralisation had important political implications: ‘Czechoslovak communist policy had tended to absorb into the state apparatus all societal activities and organisation ... The philosophy of the [New Economic Model] implied a reverse trend’.⁴⁴ Moreover, while the economic reformers had originally felt that ‘economic would bring about political democratisation’, ‘at some stage there came an awareness that the process might have to be reversed’, in other words that ‘it might be necessary first to

41. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

43. A. [Alfred] French, *Czech Writers and Politics: 1945–1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 212.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

reform the Party leadership in order to give the [economic] reforms a chance to work'.⁴⁵

As the decade progressed, changes to the political system itself began to be discussed. The ossified Marxist–Leninist principles of ‘democratic centralism’ and the ‘leading role of the Party’, while never completely discarded in official circles, were subjected to much reinterpretation. Numerous advocates of reform suggested that the Party should essentially play a role of overall supervision and coordination rather than one of absolute control, and that it might still comprise the guarantor of the country’s ideological direction while relinquishing such close involvement in the technicalities of political and economic life. Elements in the Party also acknowledged for the first time the existence of different social strata: orthodoxy dictated that socialism should have done away with class difference and that the Party must continue to eliminate all traces of ‘antagonism’, but there was a growing acceptance that social differentiation was an unavoidable facet of modern society. One of the central issues with which reformists grappled was how to enable the expression of competing group interests within the framework of Communist rule. In 1966 a committee was set up by the Institute of State and Law at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences to ‘formulate a hypothesis for the development of the political system’.⁴⁶ Chaired by the lawyer and political theorist Zdeněk Mlynář, the committee proposed a level of democratisation that would enable the various social groups to be represented; in this regard the committee members were even prepared to consider the ‘positive aspects’ of the pluralistic political systems of the West.⁴⁷

The effects of liberalisation were immediately felt in the cultural and intellectual spheres, with many writers, thinkers, artists and filmmakers promptly emboldened by the sense that change was afoot within the Party. The year 1963 was a watershed for Czechoslovak culture, offering a bravura opening round of assaults in the fight against ideological and aesthetic restriction. At the Slovak Writers’ Congress of that year, a number of speakers openly criticized Stalinist politics, and the denounced Slovak poet Laco Novomeský was readmitted to the Writers’ Union. A conference devoted to the work of Franz Kafka, a writer then considered by orthodox Communists to sit atop the ‘cultural dung heap of reaction’, was held at Liblice. According to Alexej Kusák, one of the organisers of the event, ‘after the Kafka conference everything in culture was, for a time, allowed’.⁴⁸ The conference was important

45. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

46. Zdeněk Mlynář, quoted in Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, p. 174.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Alexej Kusák, ‘Ke vzniku konference o Franzi Kafkovi v Liblicích v květnu 1963’, in *Zlatá šedesátá: Česká literatura a společnost v letech táni, kolotání a... zklamání: Materiály z konference pořádané Ústavem pro českou literaturu AV ČR 16–18. června 1999* (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu, 2000), p. 110.

not only for significantly broadening the scope of ‘permissible’ literature but also for raising the issue of the persistence of alienation within socialist society. From the world of philosophy came Karel Kosík’s *The Dialectics of the Concrete* (*Dialektika konkrétního*), a landmark work of Marxist humanist thought that implicitly critiques not merely the Stalinist ‘distortions’ of Marxism–Leninism but some basic assumptions of Leninism itself. The central concept of Marxist humanism is ‘praxis’: creative, and thereby self-realizing, human activity. For Kosík, the creative power that is innate to all human beings can extend to revolutionary activity, and it is here that Kosík clashes with Leninist thought, according to which only the Party can be the agent or ‘subject’ of history. Kosík’s reformulation of Marxism involves perceiving the world as a ‘concrete totality’, in other words as ‘a structured, developing and self-creating whole’.⁴⁹ This dynamic vision is counterposed to the vision of the world in its ‘pseudo-concreteness’ or ‘everydayness’: social reality in the latter cases is seen as finished, unchangeable, and individuals as passive objects deprived of agency. (Kosík’s critique of ‘everydayness’ has interesting implications for the Czech New Wave’s oft-noted preoccupation with everyday life: do, say, the observational films of Miloš Forman or Ivan Passer offer images of ‘concrete totality’ or only of ‘pseudo-concreteness?’)

The year 1963 also marked the real beginning of the New Wave itself, with Forman, Jaromil Jireš and Věra Chytilová all making their groundbreaking debut features in that year (*Black Peter* (*Černý Petr*), *The Cry* (*Křik*), *Something Different* (*O něčem jiném*)). The two most famous of all the small theatres, the Semafor theatre and the Theatre on the Balustrade (*Divadlo na zábradlí*), had opened in the late 1950s, but during the 1960s the movement expanded, and increasingly experimental and satirical works were staged. What bound the various developments in the arts at this time was the common rejection of the role of ideological servitude that communism had imposed on culture. This could mean asserting values or ideas contrary to those of the authorities, or simply turning one’s back on ‘politics’ (in its narrow sense) altogether. Yet artistic integrity was hardly given a smooth ride during the decade: cultural progress comprised a continuous struggle in which advances were often coupled with retreats (such as the withholding of the more problematic films, or the introduction of a stringent new press law in 1966). That culture received the degree of tolerance it did might be attributed to the fact that Novotný, though himself a hardliner, considered appeasement of the Party’s liberal factions necessary as a means of maintaining power: from this point of view, the degree of cultural liberalisation that took place could be seen as one concession to the forces of reform.⁵⁰

49. Satterwhite, *Varieties of Marxist Humanism*, p. 142.

50. Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, p. 48.

Accounts of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s often make mention of those writers who involved themselves directly in the reform movement. A relatively large amount has been written on the 1967 Czechoslovak Writers' Congress, at which a number of prominent writers (and Party members), including Milan Kundera, Ludvík Vaculík and Antonín Liehm, made speeches criticizing the Communist system, and on Vaculík's '2000 Words' manifesto, designed to encourage mass mobilisation in the interests of political improvement.⁵¹ Yet there was a much broader spectrum of cultural activity in 1960s Czechoslovakia than is often suggested, one that stretched beyond such 'engaged', party-affiliated writers such as Vaculík and embraced such radically unorthodox figures, aesthetically and politically, as Effenberger, Bondy, the young dramatist Václav Havel and the avant-garde poet Jiří Kolář. The liberal Communist writers were not the sole representatives of an 'authentic', anti-Stalinist culture in the 1960s, nor were they necessarily the most important. According to the philosopher Ivan Sviták, himself a non-conformist Marxist and a Surrealist sympathiser, the 'true intellectual leaders' of Czechoslovak culture in the 1960s were not the 'temporarily reforming Communists' but 'members of the non-Communist intelligentsia',⁵² among whom Sviták includes such figures as Effenberger, Kolář, Havel and Jan Werich. Sviták further suggests that it was these 'independent' figures that 'made the Czech culture great', by protesting 'the repressive regimentation of art' and 'promoting that organic growth of values which a totalitarian dictatorship always and everywhere hinders, no matter whether it happens to be momentarily conciliatory or aggressive'.⁵³

Sviták is correct to imply that, amidst the plethora of movements and ideas that partook of the same cultural moment, many significant artists and intellectuals were unaligned with reformist politics and maintained a more independent, and aggressively oppositional, stance. Thus it would be wrong to identify too closely the aims and values of, say, Havel or the Surrealists with those of the Prague Spring. While, as we have seen, the reformists tried to reconcile their commitment to democracy and civil rights with a persistent faith in the 'leading role' of the Party, writers such as Havel, Effenberger and Hrabal espoused, whether implicitly or explicitly, a more anarchistic or, in whatever sense, 'revolutionary' stance. (Bondy was certainly a revolutionary in more than one sense, having been variously described as a Trotskyist and a Maoist.) The humanist reinterpretations of Marxism that were then appearing

51. Z.A.B. Zeman, *The Prague Spring: A Report on Czechoslovakia 1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); Liehm, *The Politics of Culture*; Dušan Hamšík, *Writers Against Rulers*, translated by D. Orpington (London: Hutchinson, 1971).

52. Ivan Sviták, 'The Politics of Culture by Antonín J. Liehm and Peter Kussi' [book review], *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 67, No. 3, September 1973, pp. 1073–74.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 1074.

in the Writers' Union magazine, *Literární noviny*, had to compete with other, more provocative philosophical and political trends often imported from Western Europe or the USA. The writings of the radical Freudian, Frankfurt School Marxist and so-called 'father of the New Left' Herbert Marcuse, and of the French Situationists Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, were immensely popular in the Prague of the late 1960s.⁵⁴ A 1965 visit by the American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, who was crowned 'King of the May' by students of the Charles University, presaged the wide absorption of countercultural ideas and lifestyles by Prague youth: according to Alfred French, the city was known 'for a brief spell ... as the Hippie capital of Europe'.⁵⁵ Thus, in 1960s Czechoslovakia cultural life transcended the boundaries of official discussion, more closely approximating the spontaneous, 'unplanned' development of culture in democratic societies. Yet one must also acknowledge that, precisely in so far as liberals within the Party helped achieve some independence (first partial, then total) for culture, the reform movement itself was the condition for artistic and political plurality: the Party moderates sanctioned the independent radicals.

The 'disintegratory' tendency (as Effenberger would call it) of Czech and Slovak culture is evident in the diversity of the New Wave films themselves. There is no such thing as a 'Czech school' of filmmaking. The Czechoslovak New Wave has no equivalent of the Oberhausen Manifesto that launched the New German Cinema, nor did its members comprise a close group of colleagues with shared and rigorously formulated artistic tastes, as was the case with the critics-turned-filmmakers of the French *Nouvelle Vague*. The only obvious common ground between these filmmakers was their general youthfulness (although several key New Wave films were made by older figures, such as Vojtěch Jasný and František Vlácil) and their attendance at the FAMU film school. Yet the FAMU of the 1960s appears to have fostered an appetite for debate and an independent spirit more than the adherence to any aesthetic rules. Beyond their age and education, the New Wave filmmakers were united by their rejection of the prescribed aesthetics of Socialist Realism: Ivan Passer describes the New Wave as a 'conspiracy against stupidity'.⁵⁶ One might suggest that the young filmmakers were united in their opposition to uniformity itself. This individualistic mentality was obviously a reaction against the enforced homogeneity of the films of the previous decade, although it was no doubt also reinforced by the widely influential *politique des auteurs*, which promoted the idea of films as the expression of directorial subjectivity rather than as the product of collaboration or the demonstration

54. Dvorský, 'Z podzemí do podzemí', in Alan, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 141.

55. French, *Czech Writers and Politics 1945–1969*, p. 218.

56. Ivan Passer, interviewed in Robert Buchar, *Czech New Wave Filmmakers in Interviews* (Jefferson; London: McFarland and Company, 2004), p. 144.

of craft. From this perspective the filmmakers' cultivation of stylistic distinctiveness was as much a product of broad trends in film theory and practice as it was a tribute to freer political circumstances.

Institutional changes contributed further to the fostering of difference. In the early 1960s, following an internal 1962 directive, the film industry was reorganised into small, quasi-autonomous production groups, with each group headed by a major creative figure.⁵⁷ Such changes reflect the general trend towards economic decentralisation, although the specific models for the new system were the Polish 'film units', established in the mid-1950s, and the small Czech animation studios that had constituted a rare instance of autonomy within the rigidly centralised system of the Stalinist period. It is impossible to undervalue the unique situation in which Czechoslovak, Polish and Yugoslav filmmakers found themselves during this period of liberalisation: national cinemas were able to develop freely, unconstrained either by bureaucratic interference and political pressures, or by the demands of the marketplace. If, as Švankmajer has suggested, both capitalism's commercial imperatives and Stalinism's propagandistic imperatives resulted in the homogenisation of culture, it is easy to see why Czechoslovak film exhibited a greater variety at this time than at any other.

The reform process came to a head in early 1968. Liberals had by then gained increasing ground within the Central Committee and the Party's hand had also been forced by various confrontations, including the aforementioned Writers' Congress and student demonstrations in 1966 and 1967. In January 1968, Alexander Dubček, a reformist, was chosen to replace Novotný as First Secretary, and two months later, Ludvík Svoboda replaced Novotný as President. Political debate was unleashed at all levels of the Party and in public life; the 'revolution from the top' became a mass participatory process. Two independent political organisations were founded, the Club of Engaged Non-Party Members (KAN) and Club 231, comprising former victims of the Stalinist purges. In April, the Central Committee published an 'Action Programme' that outlined the new goals of the Party. According to Grzegorz Ekiert, this document 'advocated the necessity of political reforms and democratic procedures within the Communist party and other organizations', 'pointed to the need for a new electoral law ... as well as guarantees of basic political freedom for all citizens', and 'spoke of the need for other social and political organisations belonging to the National Front [a coalition of parties and mass organisations that was nominally separate from the Communist Party] to be granted autonomy and to play a larger role in the country's affairs'.⁵⁸ The Action Programme also 'supported economic reforms and the

57. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, p. 27.

58. Grzegorz Ekiert, *State Against Society: Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 139–40.

democratization of economic institutions', and even 'suggested the possibility of small-scale private enterprises'.⁵⁹ Plans were announced for convening an 'extraordinary Congress' in September, at which, it was hoped, the election of a new Central Committee would rout the remaining conservatives and thereby ease the path of reform.

Sadly, Cold War politics intervened before any substantial reforms could be implemented. The formal abolition of censorship, though of course transient, was to be one of the few significant achievements of Dubček's brief reign (another successful, and lasting, reform was the federalisation of Czechoslovakia, formally declared in October 1968). Yet subsequent accounts of the Prague Spring have questioned whether the implementation of the Action Programme's proposals would have resulted in a truly democratic system: after all, the Central Committee ruled out the existence of genuine opposition parties, against which the Communists would have had to compete in elections. As Ekiert argues, the Action Programme 'was not a radical document calling for a decisive transformation of the state-socialist system': '[t]he reformers wanted to preserve the Communist party's leading role, extensive state involvement in the economy, and the dominance of collectivist property rights'.⁶⁰ Kieran Williams writes: 'the reforms of 1968, in intention and execution, amounted to only the liberalization of a Leninist regime'.⁶¹ Be that as it may, the reforms were too radical for the Soviet Union: Brezhnev's Politburo was particularly alarmed by reports of a free media permitted to propagate anti-Soviet and 'anti-Communist' sentiments. At a July meeting between the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaderships, Dubček promised to exercise greater control over the press and to maintain Czechoslovakia's commitment to the Warsaw Pact military arrangement. The Soviets were far from reassured by subsequent developments, and another conference, this time involving all the Warsaw Pact countries, was convened in Bratislava at the beginning of August. The conference initially appeared to have resulted in a victory for the reformists: the Soviet tanks that had been stationed on Czechoslovak soil, ostensibly to practise manoeuvres, were withdrawn. Yet the tanks, along with those of the other Eastern bloc nations, were to return seventeen days later in the name of 'fraternal assistance' and the aversion of counter-revolution. The principal Czechoslovak leaders were arrested and taken to the Soviet Union, where they were forced to sign the Moscow Protocol stipulating that Czechoslovakia return to hard-line policies.

Upon his return to Prague, a shaken Dubček assured the public in a radio broadcast that something of the reform movement could still be salvaged.

59. Ibid., p. 140.

60. Ibid.

61. Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.

Despite the almost immediate reintroduction of censorship, cultural life hardly changed in the months after the invasion. Indeed, during late 1968 and 1969 Czechoslovak culture peaked in both achievement and audacity, with the Surrealists openly pursuing their activities and with many of the most aesthetically radical and politically provocative New Wave films being made. Karel Pryl argues that the invasion stirred filmmakers to defiance, and that these later films comprised a 'conscious demonstration of a refusal to give in'.⁶² By April 1969, the 'realist' Gustav Husák had manoeuvred his way to the position of First Secretary, replacing the no longer tenable Dubček. With Husák's accession, so-called Normalisation, the destruction of the reform movement and the restoration of the neo-Stalinist system, began in earnest. During the next two years thousands of high-ranking professionals lost their jobs, and hundreds of thousands were expelled from the Party. A process of screening was established as a means to test the political sympathies of Party members. As Milan Šimečka has suggested, Normalisation was a model of European civility, with not a judicial murder to Husák's name.⁶³ Nonetheless the regime was coldly, almost scientifically efficient in securing its objectives. In 1970, Normalisation spread to the film industry, and a number of the films that had been made during the previous two years were shelved. Many other films were also banned, and several notoriously designated 'banned forever'. The production groups were abolished, and the Barrandov film studio was placed under new management, with the hardline Ludvík Toman appointed as Barrandov's chief literary adviser. Among the New Wave filmmakers who did not emigrate to the West, the majority were dropped by the studio; some, such as Menzel and Chytilová, were later to bounce back with more conventional projects, while others, such as Juráček, effectively saw their careers and lives ruined by Normalisation. Outlining Barrandov's new artistic policy, Toman announced a 'return to the spectator', an end to excessive 'experiments' and 'modernness', and the rejection of 'scepticism, feelings of alienation, desperation, inconsiderate sexuality, egoistic bourgeois individualism'.⁶⁴ In other words, a decade of minor miracles, when avant-garde 'experiments' penetrated the mainstream and Eastern bloc socialism presented a liberal, human, if not fully democratic face, had decisively ended.

62. Karel Pryl, quoted in Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, p. 240.

63. Milan Šimečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia* (New York: Verso, 1984).

64. Ludvík Toman, quoted in Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, p. 241.