Chapter 2

Aesthetics or Ethics? Italian Neorealism and the Czechoslovak New Wave Cinema

LUBICA UČNÍK

> A man who has no conscience, who doesn't die, who cannot laugh, who is unaware of personal responsibility—such a man is of course the perfect unit needed in a manipulated, bureaucratically regimented system. In contrast, Man as portrayed by Czech culture of the last decade is a potential revolutionary, because he finds life in such a manipulated system unbearable.
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According to Mira Liehm, neorealist films were often described in terms of film consciousness, and despite differences among filmmakers, "all these artists, one so unlike the other, brought to life a phenomenon with clearly defined technical and moral components that influenced almost all subsequent film trends in the West and in the East" (5, 129).[1] Describing the work of Roberto Rossellini, Liehm explains that neorealists were not concerned with true pictures of facts or slices of life. What they *were* interested in was an *impact on the viewer* of a life as represented in film; neorealism was "a moral weapon aimed at the artistic conventions of the past" (71). Reality is not an independent, autonomous phenomenon that exists outside representation; it is always a construction of the filmic text. André Bazin and others argue that the style of neorealism can be traced to the Soviet montage cinema.[2] Yet neorealists did not aim to represent life as the people's struggle against the bourgeoisie, as Soviet filmmakers did, but as the individual's struggle against an overwhelming reality. As Liehm notes, "Zavattini's theory of the 'necessity to render facts as they are'" was his recognition that reality is constituted through "the relationship between men and reality" and is always open to "ontological cognition" (73). Instead of concentrating on aesthetic properties of neorealist films or enumerating techniques that supposedly define neorealism, I will argue that neorealist filmmakers' ethical-political engagement with the everyday (understood not as a mode of aesthetics but as a method) is their lasting legacy for world cinema, and in particular for Czechoslovakian cinema.

Critics and filmmakers have persistently questioned neorealism's "actuality" as a coherent movement.[3] Some critics suggest that neorealist films were not economically successful and that the aggressive commercial war of images by Hollywood hastened its death.[4] Yet as French nouvelle vague, Czechoslovak New Wave cinema, or, more recently, Iranian films indicate, neorealism in different guises seems to form a constant return of the repressed: despite the triumph of Hollywood, dedicated to the production of films with guaranteed financial return, some filmmakers understand their role to be more than just the production of entertaining and commercially lucrative films. For example, Alistair Whyte proposes, as Liehm did when speaking of Italian neorealism, that the experimental nature of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the late 1950s and 1960s is ineluctably tied to "serious moral and social problems" (94). He suggests that filmmakers intermingle humor and tragedy by manipulating stylistic techniques that create a certain element of fantasy in order to produce "more serious, more experimental, more socially critical films" (124). Likewise, Václav Macek claims that in the late 1950s, under the influence of Italian neorealism with its ideals of social truth, young filmmakers attending the film academy in Prague rejected as lies film schematism and the socialist realism of previous years to assert their right to authenticity, originality, and a meaningful artistic standpoint. The most important criteria became truthfulness, the desire to show human emotions, and conflicts rather than class-defined narratives and schematic sketches. In a certain way, this claim is the same as that made by Liehm when she argues that Italian neorealism was a moral weapon to be used against artistic conventions of the past.

One of the attributes of neorealism—from its defining moment in Italy through the French nouvelle vague, the Czechoslovak New Wave, and Iranian film, for example—is the creation of a space by and for filmmakers to account for the ethical freedom of the individual in the face of the overwhelming reality of globalization.[5] In this essay I will look at Italian neorealism's appropriation by filmmakers of Czechoslovak New Wave cinema, keeping in mind Simona Monticelli's claim that neorealism is not a singular event but an extension of earlier Italian film production. Similarly, Czechoslovak New Wave cinema did not materialize in a vacuum; it was a continuation of a longer literary history beginning in 1898.[6] I will attempt to weave together two stories: one is a kind of history of Czechoslovak cinematic politics; the second is a claim about ethics. I will outline various filmmakers' efforts to negotiate the political reality they faced and their attempts to transfer ethical concerns about the present into their work, following their endeavors through parallels between Italian neorealism and Czechoslovak New Wave cinema.

The point of this essay is not so much to offer a historical account of Czechoslovak cinema or an outline of Czechoslovak New Wave cinema; rather, by comparing Italian neorealism and Czechoslovak New Wave cinema I highlight the importance of art that provokes its public with the possibility that reality is never neutral.

Czecho-Slovakia

Properly speaking, we can locate the Czechoslovak film industry only after World War I. Until 1918, there was no Czechoslovakia. The post–World War I period marks not only the establishment of Czecho-Slovakia but also the beginning of the production of Czecho-Slovak or, rather, Czech films. It was not until 1921 that the first Slovak narrative film, *Jánošík,* was produced, and not by filmmakers from Slovakia but by a Slovak American film company. (Jánošík is the Slovak counterpart to Robin Hood, although Jánošík came from a poor family and was captured and hanged.) The director Jaroslav (Jerry) Siakel and the camera operator Daniel Siakel, Slovak brothers living in America, produced the film in two versions: one with the hero hanged at the end (as Slovak folklore has it), targeted at Czech and Slovak audiences, and a second version—made for American audiences—with a happy ending (Jánošík runs away from the gallows into the mountains with his love and lives happily ever after).[7]

The first Czech encounter with neorealism is found in the book *Náš Film* (Our film) by Luboš Bartošek. According to Bartošek, the film *Šťastnou Cestu* (*Farewell;* 1943), directed by Otakar Vávra, was almost a neorealist drama. He explains that Vávra shot the film at a dynamic pace, reverberating with the everyday tempo of modern life. The narrative was linear, yet, by way of documentary stylistic techniques, the space constantly changed, following the multiple activities of the characters. Bartošek claims that the style of neorealism, if not the name, was already employed by Vávra in the early 1940s.

World War II was "kind" to the Czechoslovak industry, if not by granting freedom of choice where subject matter was concerned, then at least in providing industrial possibilities. Antonín Liehm notes that Germans not only preserved but upgraded the film studio Barrandov. The idea behind this was that Prague would become the film capital of the Third Reich.[8] In 1945, the film industry was nationalized by the government of President Eduard Beneš, which meant that the Slovak film industry, with the help of Czech technicians and specialists, was established in Bratislava. The year 1947 marks another international success for Czechoslovakia. A film produced before the imposition of Andrey Zhdanov's socialist realist formula, *Siréna* (*The Strike*), directed by Karel Steklý, received the Golden Lion—the grand prix of the International Film Festival in Venice.

Also in 1947, in the last democratic election in Czechoslovakia, Communists won control of the government. In 1948 they ousted Beneš and other non-Communists and a single-party government was established. From then on, socialist realism became the only stylistic norm for filmmakers. The new working-class hero was born. In practice, as David Paul explains, it meant that films were about "how disciplined workers overcome imperialist sabotage; interpersonal conflicts that are resolved through the common struggle to fulfill production plans; peasants discovering the virtues of collectivization and so forth" (16). In short, any representation of the personal life of an individual was seen as an attack on the Communist Party. Not only did depiction of contemporary life disappear from film screens, but struggling, feeling, emotional individuals and their personal problems were simply eliminated. The overall outcome of the imposed cultural policies in Czechoslovakia (and other European socialist states) was twofold. According to Paul, films were produced that shunned present-day topics. Instead, films concentrated on famous events of Czech history or portrayed the lives of former Czech public figures. This was a route taken by many filmmakers who wanted to avoid the extremity of the socialist realist prescription. The other route was the socialist realist formula per se, a principle taken from Soviet cultural policy.

In 1946, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union legislated so-called Zhdanov decrees that reinforced the control of artistic production by the legislative state apparatus. This legislation was simply an extension of Zhdanov's earlier position. In August 1934, the Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union had instituted the doctrine of socialist realism as the only way to depict reality in the Soviet Union. Zhdanov, using Stalin's definition of writers as engineers of human souls, defined the responsibility of a writer or filmmaker as representing reality not in a dead scholastic way, not simply as objective reality, but in its revolutionary development. Zhdanov explained that "the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in belles lettres and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism" (in R.S.F.S.R. 21). Martin Ciel—drawing from the journal *Náš Film*—notes that from 1949 on, all photographs from abroad disappeared and strong pro-Soviet and anti-American propaganda began. Hollywood became the leading exemplar of ideological fraudulence, and the socialist realist mode was set as the only mode of artistic expression. Ciel explains that socialist realism's formula was pure and simple—the creative illustration of life. Films could not, under any circumstances, be about life here and now. According to Zhdanov, society was in transition; its interpretation should follow the official line that prescribed the *ideal* society as it would be one day in the very near future (14). In Czechoslovakia, there were some efforts to resist socialist realism and to produce films outside its prescriptive mode, as Alfred Radok's film *Daleká cesta* (*Distant Journey;* 1950) demonstrates. However, the official ideologues labeled the film existentialist, and because of the censorship regulations its screening was blocked.

The situation changed slightly after 1956 when the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union took place. Revelations about the distortion of socialism under Stalin's leadership made many reassess their political conscience and look at the past and present from a different perspective. In Czechoslovakia, struggles between the Soviet-backed old guard holding onto power and new democratic forces among the party's leadership combined with the cultural forces trying to break from socialist realism and its imposed optimism culminated in Prague in the spring of 1968. The path was then cleared for new artistic representation in cinema.

The Film Academy of Music Arts

Neorealism's influence on Czechoslovak filmmakers can be traced to the founding of the Film Academy of Music Arts (FAMU) in Prague on October 25, 1945.[9] It is generally acknowledged that Czechoslovak New Wave cinema was a cinematographic movement made up of mostly young, university-educated (at FAMU) filmmakers reacting to the imposition of a Soviet blueprint of socialist realist form and style. Galina Kopaněvová notes that in the 1960s the most important stimulus for the resurgence of Czechoslovak cinematography came from the Prague film school.[10] At first, the university curriculum stressed the "correct" educational model for new socialist filmmaking,[11] which meant that only some of the films from Soviet montage cinema were shown. The theory of this school was "improved" by Zhdanov's prescriptive formula of socialist realism. In 1950, the first generation of film graduates entered the industry. Kopaněvová praises Vojtech Jasný and Karel Kachyňa for overcoming the indoctrination of the early film school's curriculum based on "illusive, compromised" aesthetics of Zhdanov and for successfully competing with younger graduates, who were spared such didactic practices (22).

Later, as in many other Soviet satellite countries, Italian neorealist cinema was added to the film academy's curriculum.[12] Under the influence of professional filmmakers who taught at the film academy, students evaluated films made in Italy and France, especially works of Italian neorealism, French New Wave cinema, and cinema verité. They were also introduced to works of their Polish counterparts from the Polish Film School. A similar account is given by Jan Žalman mentioning Chaplin, Pudovkin, Fellini, and Truffaut as important inspirations for young cinematographers (*Films and Film-makers* 18). In light of stringent restrictions imposed on foreign films that originated from capitalist countries, Italian neorealist films were allowed by the party because of their ability to serve as examples of the deprived life of the proletariat living under capitalism. According to this logic, Italian neorealist films revealed the unethical capitalist exploitation of the masses to lucky workers living under socialism (Žalman, "Umlčený Film, Part 5" 385).

To return to the claim of neorealists that there is no "neutral reality" independent of representation, we can see how the films' meaning can be read differently. For the party's representatives, Italian neorealism revealed the corruption of the capitalist mode of production. Not so for the young filmmakers. For them, neorealism offered a way to present "socialist reality" critically, without the glossy promise of a bright future. As Mira Liehm suggests, "Neorealism holds a special place in the development of East European cinema. In the mid-fifties, its influence in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia was crucial, merging with the endeavour of these productions to free themselves from Stalinist aesthetics" (131). For the students of the film academy, neorealism represented the ethical-political possibility of an engagement with the everyday. Thanks to the film practitioners cum pedagogues—such as Milan Kundera, Elmar Klos, Otakar Vávra, and Otomar Krejča— the school offered critical and not demagogic evaluation of films. Macek also reminds us that A. M. Brousil invited well-known film practitioners to speak to students; unofficial visits by Cesare Zavattini, Giuseppe de Santis, and others were the rule rather than the exception (15–16). Later on, students were also exposed to many Western films produced and sent to Prague to be sold. Most of these films were never bought—shielding the population from the "vicious propaganda" of the West—but students saw them in the specially organized projections for study purposes only and engaged in critical discussions afterward.[13] Hence, the future filmmakers of the New Wave drew their inspirations from Italian neorealism, Soviet montage cinema, French nouvelle vague, and cinema verité.[14]

Patrick Cattrysse writes that "the Czech New Wave . . . shows formal analogies with . . . Italian neorealism and with the French New Wave movement . . . [and] a *cinema verité* style. [Films were] generally shot on location. They used natural light and nonprofessional actors who often spoke improvised dialogues" (229). According to Macek, filmmakers enthusiastically adopted Italian neorealist theoretical aspiration in order to portray people's everyday lives. Films ceased to represent the ideal picture of society and began to show reality, including all the problems people encountered daily. Macek poetically writes that "the spark from Italian Neorealism lighted a small flame that was starting to warm up" (13–14).[15]

Italian Neorealism and Czechoslovak Cinema

The similarities between the situation in Italy after World War II and in Czechoslovakia after 1956 give credence to Bazin's observation that "neorealism is [neither] the exclusive property of any one ideology nor even of any one ideal" (87). In the case of Italy, Monticelli argues that "Neo-Realist films provided an immediate response to the desire to wipe out the material and ideological legacies of fascism" (in Bazin 71), while in the Czechoslovak context, Mira Liehm reinforces Monticelli's claim, pointing out that "the neorealist experience . . . symbolized the yearning for truth and freedom that obsessed the East European filmmakers as much as the early neorealists" (131). As mentioned above, in the case of Italy the postwar situation prompted a search for new values and, in the case of Czechoslovakia, this search was triggered by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.

Miloš Fiala explains that the Twentieth Congress and its revelations allowed a distinction between socialism and its distortion by the Stalinist cult of personality. Revelations prompted filmmakers to reassess their experience, revealing at the same time the moral conflict of the period (62–63). Hence Italian postwar experience reverberates in Czechoslovakia. Rossellini can be used here to extend this qualification. The period after World War II prompted Rossellini to confront moral and emotional uncertainties of the time. Alfonso Procaccini suggests that historical circumstances force the writer (or filmmaker) to ask different questions, and through this process compel a redefinition of one's relationship to society. The important point for Procaccini is that neorealism is not only a manifestation of a subjective state, but "a disclosure which exposed a particular objective reality" while directing viewers' attention toward a specific social issue and voicing, "even if indirectly, a judgment on that reality" (43, 5). Thus in both cases, in Italy's prewar as well as postwar situation and in Czechoslovakia in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a need to reexamine the question: What is reality? For Italian and Czechoslovak filmmakers, the question belonged more to the ethical-political category than to the aesthetic one. In a similar vein, Bazin argued that "neorealism is more an ontological position than an aesthetic one" (66). Likewise, in 1974, Lino Micciché said that "Neorealism was 'an ethics of aesthetics.' It was the answer of a generation of filmmakers to the question asked by Vittorini: 'Shall we ever have a culture capable of protecting people against suffering instead of just comforting them?'" (in M. Liehm 129). Thus, as Bruce Hinrichs observes, "the realist concept was purposely altered and reconceived . . . to portray the personal, emotional truth experienced in the everyday lives of ordinary people . . . [and strove to represent] . . . some fundamental truth of the human condition" (9).

To follow the comparison between the two countries, in Czechoslovakia the partial revelation concerning Stalin's policies was also a question of personal conscience (Škvorecký 45). Žalman speaks of works that raised social and moral questions and thus addressed themselves to the public conscience (*Films and Film-makers* 18). Films such as *Tři přání* (*Three Wishes;* [1958]) and *Smrť sa volá Engelchen* (*Death Is Called Engelchen;* [1963]) by Ján Kadár and Klos represented a reaction against and denunciation of the archetypal worker struggling with class enemies. They represented a shift toward the representation of idiosyncratic individuals and their personal problems. Film narratives were altered from a prescription of an ideal life to a personal depiction of people struggling with their mundane chores. As Siegfried Kracauer observed, "[W]hen history is made in the streets, the streets tend to move onto the screen." Echoing Bazin's view that ideology is not the exclusive property of a certain style, Kracauer stresses that neorealist narratives serve to dramatize social conditions in general (*Theory of Film* 98–99). Žalman points out that Kadár and Klos frequently emphasized that "the only art . . . is art concerned with the key problems of the time, art that adopts a frank moral and social standpoint" (*Films and Film-makers* 17).

For Kadár and Klos, films cancel out the view of art that had dominated the socialist world under Stalinism. The point is not to withdraw from society to the imagined life of the individual existing as a self-subsisting atom; the aim of filmmakers is to help strengthen man's faith in common sense, in moral certitudes, in the permanent values of truth and life. The focus *is* on the individual, but it is his life as embedded in society where he must confront his choices as always choices informed by his responsibility toward oneself and the society in which he lives. Concerning man's relationship to society, Žalman notes, the purpose of the individual's actions concerns "not 'whether' but 'how' to become committed" (*Films and Film-makers* 17–18).[16] Žalman explains that the link connecting films made by Kadár and Klos, for example, is "the morally philosophical theme of compromise" ("Umlčený Film, Part 5" 201). Thus the film *Obchod na Korze* (*The Shop on Main Street*), made in 1965 and directed by Kadár and Klos, can serve as an example of the ethical dilemma of responsibility that an individual potentially faces.[17] The overall framework in which the story unfolds is World War II and the context arising from the Nazi Nuremberg racial laws. The Nazi era comes to represent an authoritarian government. The historical setting allows the filmmakers to explore freely contemporary society and the moral predicaments faced by people living under totalitarianism.

Different stylistic methods are employed to highlight the central theme of ethical responsibility.[18] The opening scene of the film is constructed as a montage of various motifs that are developed throughout the plot. Accordingly, the opening shot relates to the last scene in the film. While in the first scene, a stork seems to dance and fly as he wishes, in the last scene, faced with the ethical impasse caused by a Jewish shop owner's unintended murder, the protagonist, Tono, hangs himself. Another motif is the subjective point of view (POV) shot. The first scene is constructed as the stork's POV taken from the high, sharp angle revealing prisoners walking in a castle yard and then panning over city roofs to show people promenading on the main street. It is as though we are encouraged to see that we all are prisoners of some sort of order.

Obchod
na korze

The Shop on Main Street (Ján Kadár, Elmar Klos, 1965)

This high, sharp angle shot is repeated and varied throughout the film. The first repetition occurs in Tono's living room—the family dinner with Kolkocký. It is thus related to the opening shot, the supposed POV of the stork. Thus the scene of the family dinner is designed to show, by inference, that Tono is the prisoner of the family order and, in a larger context, a prisoner of political order as well, since his brother-in-law is the commander of Hlinka's guards, which makes him the head of the city. The shot is taken from a high, sharp angle, later used in connection with long shots, denoting Tono's subjective POV when he is not sure about himself, as, for example, in the shop he comes to appropriate as the new "Aryan" owner. His moral conscience causes him to feel uncomfortable with the role into which he was forced by his wife. He simply does not know what to say to Mrs. Lautmanová, the Jewish owner of the shop.

An interesting variation of this motif takes place at the end of the film. In front of the shop, the Nazis are rounding up Jews destined for a work camp. At this moment, Lautmanová suddenly sees what is happening outside the shop and realizes the implication of the Jews waiting for transportation. Here the same angle is used but this time as *her* subjective POV. Her lack of knowledge compels her to scream, "Tono, what is going on? I don't understand!" Terrified, Tono tries to stop her. The problematic nature of responsibility he felt toward her until then turns into panic for his own life. The final moral decision seems to be out of Tono's control.

that's what you've done,
just like a dog!

The Shop on Main Street (Ján Kadár, Elmar Klos, 1965)

Tono's relief when the Jews are taken away turns to horror when he unlocks the door of a cellar into which he pushed Lautmanová. She does not respond to his calls. A high, sharp angle implies Tono's subjective POV as Lautmanová's dead body is revealed. Marked by her Jewishness, Lautmanová can be free only when her soul leaves the body. The angle never levels (as has happened in all previous variations of this motif) as if to suggest that this time, there is no way back. Tono's moral potential is exhausted. At the same time a connection with the opening scene is established and foreclosed: a soul trapped in a body (like a bird closed in a cage) is able to fly free like a bird only when it frees itself from the "prison" of the body. The angle motif is concluded in the same scene when Tono, sitting on the chair in Lautmanová's bedroom, is framed from above, with a high, sharp angle, for the last time. By this time, his inner war and indecision have ended. The camera suggests that perhaps it is Lautmanová's soul (finally free) that looks down on him. The film closes with a dream sequence. Tono's dance with Lautmanová in front of people is only possible after death. Her Jewishness and his "Aryanism" were incompatible. Only death gave them freedom.[19]

The film is structured around Tono, an atypical hero who talks to us through a struggle with his conscience as he faces everyday moral questions.[20] The film does not offer answers but presents the everyday life of this antihero trapped in the totalitarian order by showing that moral decisions are not heroic choices that take us outside the mundane level of our lives. On the contrary, they are accumulations of banal, everyday events, never significant in themselves. And this non-conclusion is prefigured when various protagonists (like the Jew Katz, when he receives a summons to go to the camp; Lautmanová, when she sees most of her friends summoned outside the shop; and Tono on a few occasions) simply state, "I do not understand." It is left up to viewers to engage with the film's meaning and to face the ethical possibilities that we can miss, as did Tono. The filmic reality is presented to viewers not as a fait accompli, not as something that simply mirrors the existing world. It is up to viewers to make sense of Tono's ethical dilemma.

In a parallel endeavor, as Rossellini suggests, "neorealism involves a greater interest in individuals . . . through the investigation of reality" in order to "reach an understanding of things, and to give them their true value" (in M. Liehm 137). Italian neorealist filmmakers as much as New Wave cinematographers strove to produce films that would present reality anew; the film simultaneously will reveal and compel spectators to get involved with the social and ethical issues explored. Czechoslovak filmmakers—as much as those in Italy after the war—recognizing spectators' involvement in the text's construction of meaning, attempted to face up to ethical issues that confronted people in their respective political circumstances.[21] Procaccini suggests that neorealism "serves a double function: to be diagnostic as much as prognostic. . . . To bridge the two is to form a political consciousness" (52–53). In the end, the ideal achievement of this new art will be when the film's ending prompts viewers to engage in a new understanding of the world around them. It was precisely this possibility of critique triggered by new artistic expressions that the old-new communist guards feared the most. As Liehm and Liehm argue, "[E]very advance, every experiment, as well as any attempt to establish contact with native or European artistic tradition of the twentieth century, was considered to be an expression of opposition and rebellion—and in effect, really was" (231).

Dirty Linen

We can see here another parallel between the Italian and Czechoslovak experiences: films that answer the question "What is reality?" by suggesting that it is all around us, embodied in the small problems we struggle with every day and in the authorities who reject this idea. In 1949, the Italian government's response to a neorealist vision of reality was a censorship law for films. This so-called *legge Andreotti* withheld financial support from the state and severely limited production of films representing struggling people in Italy. Neorealist films were blamed for "washing dirty linen in public" and for "slandering Italy abroad." Giulio Andreotti wrote an open letter to Vittorio De Sica, demanding that he "assume his social responsibility, which cannot be limited to a description of the poverty and abuses of a system" (in M. Liehm 57, 91). Similar charges were laid against filmmakers in Czechoslovakia.

In February 1959, the First Film Festival of Czechoslovak Films opened in Banská Bystrica. Contrary to general expectations, the occasion was used by the government to publicly criticize and condemn certain trends in Czechoslovak cinema, especially films that attempted to look critically at socialist praxis. This event marked the strongest criticism of the cinema by the Communist Party since 1948. The official speaker asked a number of rhetorical questions, such as, "What are the themes of our films, which should talk about contemporary society?" (in Fiala 68). Josef Škvorecký explains that Václav Kahuda, the minister of culture, blamed directors because they represented themes taken almost exclusively from private life that were not sufficiently optimistic. Moreover, reminiscent of Andreotti's accusations, Kahuda mourned that films showed "contemporary settings exclusively among old decrepit tenements, where life goes on in corridors and dirty flats" (in Škvorecký 60).[22] Andreotti would have been delighted to hear Kahuda's indictment and condemnation. In particular, according to Škvorecký, Kahuda condemned the impact of Italian neorealism. As far as the Communist Party was concerned, it was one thing to approve films that reveal the exploitation of people in capitalist countries but quite another to apply the same treatment to the socialist society of Czechoslovakia. In conclusion, Kahuda asked the question, "When will we see our positive, proletarian, contemporary hero, political and public worker in our cinemas? How will our film help to change life for the better; how will film help to enrich our citizens with ideals, morals, and aesthetic values?" (Fiala 68). Thus, Italian neorealism turned out to be a blessing as much as a curse for Czechoslovak filmmakers.

Clearly, the party's moral and political ideals were incompatible with those of filmmakers. The speaker (and the party) called for a continuation of, or rather a return to, the socialist realism that had dominated cinema screens since 1948. Again the call was for cutout, bright-eyed heroes who change history and build socialism, whose only problem was figuring out how to fulfill the five-year plan and produce more steel than any other country in the world. Socialist heroes had no personal problems; in fact, they had no personal lives at all. Here the personal was always tied to Stakhanov's ideal; an imaginary representation of society not yet here but coming soon: the "land, where tomorrow already means yesterday."[23] The only problem with the present (1959) was that tomorrow seemed a long way off and yesterday was the Twentieth Congress. Given this state of affairs, Škvorecký reminds us that because of the revelations of the Twentieth Congress, charges against filmmakers could not be formulated any longer as "intentional enmity, or of plotting schemes injurious to socialism; [and] the Jews, [directors] Kadár and Jasný [could not be conveniently] accused of a Zionist plot; and even the well-worn CIA failed to get into speeches." All in all, two main culprits were identified: the Italian neorealist formula, wrongly applied to an otherwise bright socialist life, and "the remnants of bourgeois thought, represented by Yugoslav revisionism" (62). Clearly, Zavattini's method of rendering facts as they are was dangerous when applied to representations of Czechoslovak life. The party was interested only in "ideal" facts, how things would ideally be sometime in the future. As Škvorecký notes, "the socialist-realist critics tolerated [neorealism] in Italian films, but were allergic to it in Czech cinema" (44).

Unlike the Italian situation, criticism was not the end of the affair in Czechoslovakia. In Italy, Andreotti could refuse to give money to film production and the Andreotti laws could make foreign distribution of certain films difficult, if not impossible. In Czechoslovakia, however, at least until a regime change, the party could outlaw already produced films forever. The film *Tři přání* (*Three Wishes;* 1958), directed by Kadár and Klos, was singled out and banned because of its "nihilism, petty bourgeois scepticism and defeatism" (Fiala 68).[24] Films such as *Tři přání, Zde jsou lvi* (*Here Are Lions;* Václav Krška, 1958), *Konec jasnovidce* (*The End of a Clairvoyant;* Vladimír Svitáček, 1958), and *Hvězda jede na jih* (*The Star Goes to South;* Oldřich Lipský, 1958) were prohibited and withdrawn from distribution. Furthermore, Kadár and Klos could not work in the film industry for the next two years. Reorganization at the top level of the Barrandov film studio followed, and censorship was reinforced through the so-called autocensorship of an author. As Žalman observes, "Nobody seems to wonder why this young generation was blamed and punished; the generation, which grew up and was educated during the socialist era, which knew and experienced only the socialist system and further on, never looked for solutions to the problems beyond this system, but always within it" ("Umlčený Film, Part 1" 146). As a result of the First Film Festival of Czechoslovak Films and the criticism of the film industry by the Communist Party and government officials, cinema was thrown back to the optimistic socialist realism era.

In the first half of the 1960s, the struggle reopened with the party still managing to keep films from the domestic market using censorship regulations and its bureaucratic apparatus. Although censorship became less stringent, there was one final act of conspicuous open interference by the party, which resulted in the condemnation of films by Jan Němec and Ewald Schorm and prohibitions on the distribution of *O slavnosti a hostech* (*The Party and the Guests;* Němec, 1965) and *Každý den odvahu* (*Courage for Every Day;* Schorm, 1964). In January 1968, Alexander Dubček came to power and on March 1, 1968, censorship was lifted. Media openly engaged in debates about freedom, democracy, and "socialism with a human face." Films locked in the party's vault were released but not for long. On August 21, 1968, all this came to an end. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact ended artistic freedom. It took another year, but the ensuing normalization process—that is, the reintroduction of censorship and the reapplication of the Soviet model with central power over the economy, politics, and culture—became facts of life in Czechoslovakia until the Velvet revolution in 1989. These events meant the end of Czechoslovak New Wave cinema. Many filmmakers of the New Wave, such as Věra Chytilová, Miloš Forman, Juraj Herz, Jaromil Jireš, Juraj Jakubisko, Jiří Menzl, Němec, and Schorm, were forbidden to make films, while others chose to leave Czechoslovakia. Among those who left were Forman, Herz, Němec, and Schorm. Alternately, some turned to the realm of fairy tales for children.

Czechoslovak New Wave cinema attempted to do what Liehm suggests Rossellini did when he finished *Rome, Open City* in 1945. According to her, "Rossellini already saw film as an instrument of a modern vision, a way of seeing things '*with one's own eye*'" (63, italics added). I suggest that it is this idea—to represent life through one's own eyes and challenge moral and political complacency—that Czechoslovak filmmakers appropriated from Italian neorealism. They attempted to formulate new ways of understanding reality.[25] They endeavored to challenge their audiences to face up to the moral and political landscape of their lives. The message of the New Wave cinema was enunciated as an ever-present need to confront the everyday in order to lead meaningful lives. This is what Italian neorealism attempted for the first time in film, and it is this heritage that is taken up anew by filmmakers whenever reality needs to be renegotiated.

Notes

1. See also Sorlin, "Neorealism."
2. See Bazin 42; M. Liehm 5–6. See also Nichols, who writes, "constructivist art, Soviet montage theory, and the European avant-garde stood in accord: the world as it offers itself to us provides the starting point for both political and aesthetic acts of transformation" (596; see also nn. 21, 38, 53).
3. See, for example, M. Liehm; Sorlin, "Neorealism"; and Furhammar and Isaksson (especially 87–92). For a critical appraisal, see Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 1–6. For a critical account of literary neorealism, see Procaccini.
4. See Mattelart, "European Film Policy" in Hill and Gibson.
5. Richard Corliss—noting the influence of "Italian postwar neorealism"—writes that "Iran is today's one great national cinema. Not since the Czech New Wave of the mid-60s has a country made such a lovely noise at the big festivals and in Western capitals. . . . Directors Abbas Kiarostami (*A Taste of Cherry*), Jafar Panahi (*The White Balloon*) and . . . Mohsen Makhmalbaf (*Gabbeh*) are . . . revered in the world of film" (85).
6. See Bartošek; Škvorecký 54ff; Whyte 91ff.
7. Bartošek. See also Brož.
8. See Piech 38; A. Liehm, *Closely Watched Films* 84; Liehm and Liehm 26–27.
9. M. Liehm 6. The importance of film education to the success of filmmaking can be traced to the first film school, the Soviet State Film School, which was established in 1919. The formation of an Italian film school in 1934 in Rome had a similar effect. The school graduates included Roberto Rossellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Giuseppe De Santis, and Luigi Zampa.
10. See M. Liehm 6; Kopaněvová 22. For a different reading, see Hames 81.
11. See Kučera.
12. Iordanova writes, "The stylistic influences over Balkan cinema can be located mostly within Europe—the Italian Neorealism and the French *Nouvelle Vague*. . . . The visual style, however, was mostly influenced by the dynamic camerawork seen in Czech cinema of the 1960s, and by the elaborately staged takes of directors such as Hungarian Milkos Jancso and Russian Andrei Tarkovsky, as well as by the tableau-style of Georgian Sergei Paradjanov" (23–24).
13. See A. Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*; A. Liehm, "Miloš Forman"; Liehm and Liehm; Macek 15–16; Žalman, *Films and Film-makers*; Škvorecký.

14. See, for example, Ciel 18; Trančík; Brož 54.
15. Bazin and Gilles Deleuze claim that Italian neorealism also influenced the French nouvelle vague; I will concentrate only on Italian neorealism's impact on Czechoslovak filmmakers.
16. The idea that ethical norms can be derived unproblematically from the social life of the community had already been questioned by Hegel. It follows then that in the absence of the prescribed mode of the good and virtuous life, it is the question of responsibility that comes to the fore. The "ethics of responsibility," to use Adorno's expression, becomes linked to an individual's acting in the world. This moral attitude of an individual forged by taking up different options is the theme running through these films.
17. The film received an Academy Award in the foreign film category in 1965.
18. The treatment of the story is a mixture of Kafkaesque desperation with the satirical undertones of Hašek.
19. In his first dream sequence, while still alive, he does not dare promenade with her in public.
20. If the narrative of the film had been couched in a socialist realism mode, Tono would have acquired a proletarian consciousness and engaged in an underground struggle against the Nazi occupants with other unsatisfied workers, probably sacrificing his life for his country and Communist ideals along the way.
21. For a discussion of the spectator's activity in reading film text, see Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 308–09. See also Bordwell, *Narration;* Bordwell and Thompson; Sobchack.
22. See also Fiala 67–68.
23. This quote refers to the title of a book about the Soviet Union in which changes happen so quickly that the tomorrow of other countries is a yesterday in the Soviet Union.
24. Most condemned the film without actually seeing it. See Fiala; Škvorecký.
25. Some of these directors and their films include Věra Chytilová: *Pytel blech* (*A Bagful of Fleas;* 1962), *O něčem jiném* (*Something Different;* 1963), *Semikrásky* (*Daisies;* 1966); Miloš Forman: *Černý Petr* (*Peter and Pavla;* 1963), *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Loves of a Blonde;* 1965), *Hoří má panenko* (*Firemen's Ball;* 1967); Juraj Herz: *Spalovač mrtvol* (*Cremator;* 1968); Elo Havetta: *Slávnosť v botanickej záhrade* (*The Party in the Botanical Garden;* 1969); Juraj Jakubisko: *Kristove roky* (*Crucial Years;* 1967), *Zbehovia a pútnici* (*Deserters and Pilgrims;* 1968), *Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni* (*Birds, Orphans and Fools;* 1968); Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos: *Smrť sa volá Engelchen* (*Death Is Called*

Engelchen; 1963), *Obžalovaný* (*The Accused;* 1964), *The Shop on Main Street* (1965); Jiří Menzl: *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Watched Trains;* 1966), *Skřivánci na niti* (*Skylarks on a String;* 1970); Jan Němec: *O slavnosti a hostech* (*The Party and the Guests;* 1966); Evald Schorm: *Každý den odvahu* (*Courage for Every Day;* 1964), *Návrat straceného syna* (*Return of the Prodigal Son;* 1966), *Farářůuv Konec* (*The End of a Priest;* 1968); Štefan Uher: *Slnko v sieti* (*Sunshine in a Net;* 1962), Organ (*The Organ;* 1963).