

Introduction

Canons of Czech Cinema

Since the fall of communist regimes in countries of the former Eastern Bloc film historians have been questioning some of the assumptions that had shaped cinema histories of the region. For instance, they have drawn attention to the ideological interests underpinning the canonisation of certain types of films. Anikó Imre has pointed out that approaches to Eastern European cinemas had been strongly informed by Western paradigms; films from the region had normally been ‘evaluated by the West, in the West, and for the West on a selective basis, privileging films and directors who took an oppositional stand in relation to communist totalitarianism in their filmic commentaries’.¹ As she continues, this narrow focus left many areas of film cultures neglected: ‘The preoccupation with national cinema’s and the national auteur’s ideological commitment, while undoubtedly relevant, left little else to be considered’.² One of the tasks scholars have set for themselves since the fall of the Iron Curtain is to pay more attention to the areas of cinema production that the limited lens of ‘auteur as a radical artist’ overlooked.

This book contributes to this ongoing endeavour in several ways. Firstly, it focuses on the idea of the popular, which still so often sits in some realms of argument outside perceptions of cultural value and serious interest. Secondly, it takes an interest in the processes that come to play in the writing of cinema history itself. It explores in particular the contexts and assumptions that underlie the value judgements that shape ideas about what national cinema is and should be. At its core, this book is very much concerned with the question of what is considered to be important and valuable, by whom, and why.

The impetus for this specific project came mainly from the lack of existing writing on post-1989 Czech cinema. Just like many national cinemas of the region, Czech cinema faced many challenges after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It is now generally accepted that while the figure of the oppositional national auteur representing Eastern European national cinemas at international film festivals

had traditionally been the centre around which histories of the region had been written and evaluated, change in the political situation did not raise the profile of these national cinemas. Repeatedly, we come across arguments claiming that interest in cinemas from the region has even decreased since the fall of the Iron Curtain. According to Ewa Mazierska for example, ‘Eastern European cinema is now regarded as even less fashionable than it was’.³ Similarly, Peter Hames and Catherine Portuges argue that in the last few decades ‘a generation of critics and audiences have grown up for whom the cinemas of Eastern Europe are very much unknown territory’.⁴ While Hames and Portuges seem to be arguing that cinemas of the region deserve more attention because they have produced at least some films that adhere to certain notions of value and quality, others have indicated that one of the reasons behind this decreased interest is in fact the difficulty of applying former commonly used interpretative strategies in evaluations of these films. Imre points out that ‘With the oppositional political ground pulled out from under them, most of the new films have been deemed less impressive, both aesthetically and ideologically, than those made during the heroic decades of socialism’.⁵

This perception of inferiority of much of post-communist cinema can definitely be observed in written works on Czech cinema. Quite often research, rare as it is, struggles not to reaffirm the prevailing hierarchies and beliefs that these films are of lesser quality. Regarding the academic literature on post-1989 Czech cinema available in English, Francesco Pitassio notices that ‘in what research has been produced, the focus is often on issues of authors and style, with related attempts to trace lineages connecting the golden era of the Czech and Slovak New Wave to the less highly regarded present time’.⁶ Pitassio draws attention to several issues in literature on Czech post-communist cinema: on the one hand there is an over-reliance on film-centred approaches that tend to overlook the variety of contexts these films have been consumed in by different audiences. At the same time, these studies rarely go beyond merely reaffirming notions of mediocrity of recent productions.⁷

For an example of this tendency, we can look at Peter Hames’s overview of Czech post-1989 cinema output; he concludes his essay by saying that ‘the films produced in the 1990s, despite considerable achievements, still do not match those of the “Socialist” 1960s’.⁸ Similarly, Andrej Halada, who wrote one of the first book-length evaluations of post-communist Czech cinema, finds Czech cinema of the 1990s to be lacking. While, according to him, ‘the overall level of film

production increased from 1992 to 1996', these films remain in the shadow of a more glorious past.⁹ As he says:

*The sixties really seem to be the artistically most fruitful period of Czech film as a whole. . . . Subsequent development, however, meant a decrease from such a level, even though the seventies and eighties brought some very good accomplishments in individual cases. Czech film after 1945 has its horizon in the sixties, towards which the way led upwards, then the descent into averageness followed. The nineties continue to follow this standard of artistically not very substantial production.*¹⁰

Many arguments in both Halada's and Hames's texts are largely concerned with the changing conditions in the industry, especially the drastic decrease of state funding in the 1990s. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which marked the end of the socialist regime and command economy in the country, the film industry was treated 'as a business like any other'¹¹ and the state showed little willingness to subsidise it. Many filmmakers therefore had to work with very low budgets and in their attempts to appeal to audiences they often resorted to forms of filmmaking that did not earn praise from cultural critics. While the issues with transition to the market model and the subsequent lack of funding are certainly valid concerns, both Halada and Hames tend to rely on the binary opposition 'artistic freedom vs. commerce', which positions the whole output of post-communist cinema as compromised by the commercial pressures of the market. It appears that, in the commercial environment in which Czech filmmakers have found themselves since 1989, creativity and quality can barely survive. Hames says that 'without some kind of radical support structure, it seems that we can look forward to a future of thwarted talents and lost opportunities'.¹² Halada similarly thinks that in the commercial environment 'the audience and financial pressure lead . . . to pandering and small ambitions'.¹³ In this regard, he believes, 'Czech commercial films are as a whole equally bad as their pre-war predecessors'.¹⁴ It seems to me that such an approach – that can only see cinema as haunted by the commercial environment it operates in – simply does not produce or encourage deeper understanding, as it leaves the majority of existing films deadlocked in the state of perceived inferiority. This book therefore aims to address this problem by paying attention to the reception of Czech cinema. Very few attempts have been made to explore what meanings circulate around Czech films in different contexts but

also what unstated assumptions and ideas of value underly the debates about them.

In fact, a common approach to dealing with the issue of quality in contemporary Czech cinema has been to elevate a few examples that seem to have arisen despite the inadequate conditions in the national film industry. Therefore, films of Jan Svěrák are for example usually highlighted in existing overviews of the 1990s Czech cinema.¹⁵ However, these valorisations often rely on ideas of some seemingly universal quality that are never scrutinised. Virtually no attention has been paid to the justifications on which these claims of value are being made. For example, in one attempt to extend the approaches applied to post-communist Czech cinema, Jan Čulík looks at a vast number of films made in the first eighteen years after the revolution. In his ambitious book, the title of which can be translated as *What We Are Like: Czech Society in Fiction Film of the Nineties and Noughties*, he draws on Kracauer's work on German cinema and attempts to analyse the images and value systems permeating Czech cinema. As he says, his aim is to uncover what films express about 'contemporary society, the nature of Czechness, the role and situation of Czechs and Czech nation in the past and present'.¹⁶ He therefore outlines a wide variety of films in different sections, which are divided based on the periods these films are set in and the themes they deal with. However, in a rather curious step, the conclusion of his book includes a list of the 'best 45 films' that he believes will survive the test of time. It is an interesting decision because such a search for some kind of cultural value did not seem to figure in the book's goals. Acknowledging the discourse of inferiority that has governed much of the writing on post-communist Czech cinema, Čulík writes that 'Despite the fact that according to critics the majority of contemporary Czech films are "bad", I am convinced that the majority of the above mentioned forty "best" pictures will survive long – quality-wise, they equal even international productions'.¹⁷ The question of survival of these films is of course interesting. Čulík indicates that the standing of films in canons is not fixed but a matter of negotiation and fluctuation. However, no consideration is paid to this negotiation and the criteria of value Čulík or anyone else might employ in it. In Čulík's writing it seems that such canonisation occurs seemingly organically by a broader recognition of what seems to be the film's inherent qualities that this critic has already recognised. The state of such hierarchies as 'product[s] of the cultural distinctions through which the tastes of certain groups are rejected and the tastes of others acquire authority'¹⁸ simply has not been sufficiently analysed in the Czech context.

More importantly, however, I believe that it is this search for some notions of cultural value that critics struggle to identify in films that has left Czech post-socialist cinema a largely unexplored area. As Petra Hanáková has commented on the existing scholarly work, 'It is as if the cinema of the transition period defies conceptualization and apprehension, and as if the well-known Polish saying "it is as difficult to understand as a Czech film" came in our times to haunt the reflection of Czech cinema itself'.¹⁹ Despite the fact that more than ten years have already passed since Hanáková's comment, a more recent issue of the magazine *Cinepur* focused on post-1989 Czech cinema makes very similar observations, saying that 'we generally know only very little about the transition era of Czech film. The turn of the nineties, as well as the whole following decade in which filmmakers reaped the consequences of this transformation remains a practically unknown chapter in the history of Czech cinema'.²⁰ The aim of this book is therefore twofold: to contribute to the exploration of post-communist Czech cinema on the one hand, but also to problematise some of the unquestioned assumptions that have been shaping evaluations of Czech post-communist cinema.

An important step in analysing the assumptions figuring in perceptions about Czech cinema was undertaken by Jindřiška Bláhová who has looked at developments in the critical reception of *Closely Watched Trains (Ostře sledované vlaky; Jiří Menzel, 1966)* by Western critics in the 1960s. As Bláhová points out, Western critics gradually started regarding the film as a central work of what has come to be known as the Czechoslovak New Wave. *Closely Watched Trains* thus, according to Bláhová, significantly 'shaped the way in which Czechoslovak, and Czech film has been evaluated and measured in a long term'.²¹ While many American critics in the 1960s praised the film's balance of humour and tragedy and focus on the story of 'ordinary' people, the film was not always positively received in countries of Western Europe. However, Bláhová notices a difference in interpretations of the film made in the press after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968. This invasion ended the brief period of democratisation in the country known as the Prague Spring and was followed by a period of 'normalisation' which was meant to remove the reforms made by the Prague Spring government. In the context of the reception of *Closely Watched Trains*, the invasion also provided a topical reference that gave the film a particular relevance. The film was more commonly interpreted as a 'gesture of creative resistance' and 'Criticism became for many a public space for expressing solidarity'.²² Bláhová argues that such interpretations reinforced specific perceptions about Czech film-

makers, which placed an emphasis on the romanticised ‘image of a total clash between the “artist” and the system’.²³ Furthermore, *Closely Watched Trains* gradually came to represent a key work in the canon of the Czechoslovak New Wave, demonstrating values based on which other films were categorised as ‘more, or conversely less, “Czech New Wave”’.²⁴ A specific set of elements that were being interpreted as the ‘basic generic “national” signs of Czechoslovak production as such’ crystallised: ‘humour, a sense for the ordinary, realness between tragedy and comedy, the little Czech man’.²⁵

In this book I argue that, indeed, the terms Bláhová finds to have taken shape in foreign receptions of *Closely Watched Trains* as signs of Czechness figure strongly in perceptions about Czech cinema in the first few decades following the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Constructions of Czech cinema continue to resort to concepts such as humour, tragedy and a focus on ‘ordinary’ people. However, I demonstrate that these elements are not always tied to ideas of cultural value, but they shift based on the contexts they are appropriated in. This book explores a variety of contexts and identifies not only shifting notions of value but also changing views about the role of Czech cinema in media discourse.

National Cinema as a Discursive Construct

This book is not only a study of one specific national cinema, but also explores how ideas of national cinema are articulated and constructed by different institutions for different purposes. At first glance, the decision of this book to focus on a single national cinema might seem to go against the trend of questioning the label of ‘national’ in cinema studies. It has become commonly accepted that approaching cinema cultures ‘as a seamless totality that somehow accurately expresses, describes, and itemises the salient concerns and features of a given national culture’ is a limited approach, not least because it overshadows the diversity of given cultures and different forms of exchanges taking place between them.²⁶ As a result, increasing emphasis has been placed on cinema as an essentially transnational phenomenon constantly influenced by different transnational and regional exchanges. As Mette Hjort points out, quite often the term transnational has been used to answer questions that would have previously been part of an interest in national cinemas.²⁷ In the context of Eastern European cinemas, the post-communist transition has increased the level of significance of consid-

ering transnational exchanges, as national cinemas of the region have become more dependent on investments from foreign productions. According to Imre, ‘the state’s most important job has become the creation of an economic environment that allows for the gradual lowering of regulation to seduce the foreign investment’.²⁸

However, it would be wrong to suggest that looking at a national cinema is not a valid endeavour. In fact, the idea of national cinema still survives and has particular importance for many institutions. Filmmakers, critics and state institutions all have an interest in maintaining notions of national cinema culture. Andrew Higson has noted that ‘if the concept of national cinema is considered troublesome at the level of theoretical debate, it is still a considerable force at the level of state policy’.²⁹ Indeed, even the Czech Republic, which has been criticised by writers for not providing enough support for the national cinema, did take some measures that were meant to preserve it and support its development. The law 241/1992 Sb passed in 1992 established the State Fund for the Development of Czech Cinematography which was meant to offer some financial support for national cinema, despite the fact that, as indicated above, the financial resources it operated with have been deemed by many to be insufficient.³⁰

Another area in which the idea of the national also persists is the film industry itself. Admittedly, it is often believed that small nations need to rely on transnational exchanges in order to maintain their cinema industries. Portuges and Hames argue that ‘All of the countries [of Eastern Europe], including even a relatively large nation such as Poland, have film markets too small to sustain the increased costs of film production, and they have become dependent on a number of strategies for survival’.³¹ However, in the Czech context these strategies rarely involve intentionally producing films with international audiences in mind, in the way some cinemas of small nations do.³² As Pitassio writes, Czech cinema ‘is little-known beyond the national borders and does not do too well at international film festivals’.³³ Indeed, the primary audience for many Czech films has been imagined mainly around national borders. One article published in the Czech press in late 2000s therefore argues that foreign markets are treated ‘mostly as a question of prestige’ rather than economic necessity.³⁴ According to one film producer quoted in the article, ‘the foreign market is essentially economically uninteresting’.³⁵ This producer thinks that ‘Czech films generally sell very badly because they deal with issues and topics that don’t interest foreign countries. From our point of view, the domestic market is the main one’.³⁶ Similarly, Andrej Halada finds Czech

films produced in the 1990s to have merely ‘domestic significance and resonance’ (which he implies to be a sign of their inferiority, compared to those films made in the 1960s).³⁷

It needs to be pointed out, however, that Czech films enjoy some level of popularity in Slovakia as well. One study for example found that between the years 1996 and 2012 admissions in Slovakia constituted 44 per cent of all foreign admissions for Czech films.³⁸ This, of course, does not indicate what percentage this market constitutes in total admissions of Czech films. It does however draw attention to the historically interconnected nature of Czech and Slovak cinemas. Peter Hames has argued that Czech and Slovak film industries have long been considered separate, even during the existence of Czechoslovakia.³⁹ On the other hand, there are numerous reasons to question an easy differentiation between the two national cinemas, one of them being the exchanges of creative personnel between the two nations, which continue to remain common even to this day. After all, Hames himself largely considers traditions of both cinemas together throughout his book. Despite this, on the level of discourse, the idea of ‘national audience’, wherever the borders of this imagined community might lie, remains important for Czech filmmakers.

Furthermore, criticisms directed at the insufficient levels of state support for national cinema indicate another site in which the idea of national cinema remains prominent – the institution that Christian Metz, or rather his translator Ben Brewster, collectively labelled ‘the cinematic writer’.⁴⁰ Under this term Metz includes various types of writing on film – critics, historians and theoreticians.⁴¹ Despite the rather limited amount of academic work on Czech post-socialist cinema, Czech cinema has a special position in the sphere of mainstream film criticism. Often a sense of responsibility is connected to the role and relationship of criticism with Czech cinema. In his preface to Halada’s book, critic Jan Lukeš argues that art and criticism are ‘conjoined vessels’ that are meant to work together.⁴² Therefore, ‘The success of Czech cinema in the 1960s was not based only on the connection of sensitive and perceptive dramaturgy with prescient production, but also on the exceptionally agile role of film criticism’.⁴³ Lukeš therefore finds that the task that both post-socialist Czech cinema and criticism face is to ‘renew memory about itself’.⁴⁴ In another article critic Kamil Fila similarly thinks that ‘traditional film criticism’ has the desire to ‘nurture Czech film, look after its development and discuss with authors on an almost dramaturgical level “how to do it so that art thrives”’.⁴⁵ In opposition to traditional critics, he believes that young ‘irresponsible’ critics pay

little attention to Czech films. As he says, they lack the willingness ‘to lead a mutually enriching dialogue’.⁴⁶ In these accounts the critic is presented as a knowledgeable spectator who should play an active role in the cultivation of national cinema.

This study therefore looks at national cinema as a discursive construct – a series of perceptions articulated and relied on by different institutions. For the purposes of this book, I focus especially on the ‘image and idea’⁴⁷ of Czech cinema arising at the intersection of the film industry and the cinematic writer. I explore the ideas about what ‘Czech cinema’ is and conversely what it should be according to different users of the term. This approach allows me to consider varying ideas and opinions and therefore not enforce high levels of homogeneity, while also allowing me to explore how these ideas about the national interact and are negotiated in relation to ideas about the ‘outside’. While this book focuses on only one specific national cinema, it is my belief that its approach could similarly be adapted for analyses of other national, but also regional and supranational identities and the way they are articulated and maintained by institutions and media discourses.

Czech Cinema as Popular Cinema

As I mentioned above, scholarly works on Eastern European cinemas written in recent years have often sought to draw attention to forms of cinema that had been neglected in the past. Part of the project has been exploring cinemas of the region as popular rather than just a set of art cinema traditions. This gap was addressed, for instance, at a conference entitled *Lost Cinema* organised in 2007 in Tallinn and the subsequent special issue of *Place and Location: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics* that presented some research from the conference. The aims of the conference were to bring attention back to forms of socialist cinemas that were evading academic scrutiny and had become the ‘lost cinema’ – the ‘popular cinema, cartoon animation, documentary film-making, educational cinema, children’s films, low-brow comedies’.⁴⁸ In a more recent publication, Dorota Ostrowska, Francesco Pitassio and Zsuzsanna Varga focus specifically on East Central Europe – Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland.⁴⁹ Aiming to address the common exclusion of Eastern Europe from accounts on European popular cinemas, they draw attention to transnational exchanges as well as the national traditions of these cinemas which emerged during the socialist periods

and after. This book builds on this existing work and explores Czech cinema as a ‘popular’ phenomenon. Indeed, I analyse the shifting meanings that such a designation accrues and how it figures in notions of quality and value of Czech cinema.

One of the main reasons behind the emphasis on the popular in this book is the fact that cinema has often been seen as popular in the ‘market’ definition of the word in the Czech Republic.⁵⁰ In this country of around 10 million people it was common for cinemas to sell over 50 million tickets every year before 1989. After the Velvet Revolution these numbers decreased drastically, however. In 1999, admissions dropped to a historical low of 8.3 million.⁵¹ The situation somewhat stabilised afterwards and Czech cinemas were relatively steadily attracting over 10 million spectators almost every year between the years 2001 and 2020. 2019 was the most successful year since 1993, with over 18 million tickets sold.⁵² In fact, Aleš Danielis has argued that when cinema attendance dropped in the 1990s, distributors did not at first consider this to be a major issue – revenues were not majorly affected due to the increasing ticket prices. As he says, ‘Distributors commented on it with slight optimism. They had no idea how much further attendance can plummet. We dropped to the level of successful European countries in the number of visits per citizen. And people have always gone to the cinema after all . . .’⁵³ With this statement Danielis indicates that distributors were in fact counting on the status of cinema as a popular medium in the hope that people would keep the industry afloat.

Similarly, despite the decreased audience attendance in the 1990s, Czech films often register among the most attended films in Czech cinemas. In 2005, film critic Darina Křivánková wrote an article for the daily newspaper *Lidové noviny* about the dedication of Czech audiences to domestic films. She reports that ‘Czechs like Czech films. That is (for now) an indisputable fact for which all neighbouring countries envy us. If a domestic hit is born, even *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* don’t stand a chance’.⁵⁴ Indeed, it occasionally becomes the case that Czech films attract bigger audiences than Hollywood blockbusters. In 2003, one of the years that Křivánková writes about, *Pupendo* (Jan Hřebejk, 2003) topped the box office and beat *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, 2002), *The Matrix Reloaded* (Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, 2003) and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Chris Columbus, 2002), in second, third and fourth place, respectively. According to Křivánková, ‘The friendliness towards domestic films is a feature with which we stand in the same line with such film superpowers as France, or populous and incomparably more patriotically tuned Poland’.⁵⁵

It is not my aim to compare how the popularity of Czech films in the Czech Republic stands next to national cinemas of other countries. However, it seems important to me to emphasise the popularity of Czech cinema in the domestic market. I will argue that it is indeed the idea of Czech cinema as welcoming to broad audiences that figured strongly in the promotion and reception of films analysed in this book. I will argue that the value of several films released in the 1990s was often negotiated in the mainstream press in relation to ideas about Czech cinema traditions and broad audience appeal. However, while perceptions of Czech cinema as ‘popular’ reappear in many discourses analysed in this study, they are variously tied to notions of value, shifting from one group to another, as well as in time. For this reason, it is important to remember that the popular is not so much a fixed category with a stable meaning, nor a matter of textual qualities of specific films but ‘a site of struggle, a place, where conflicts between dominant and subordinate groups are played out and distinctions between the cultures of these groups are continuously constructed and reconstructed’.⁵⁶ These conflicts have been fruitfully explored in numerous works on film reception in other national contexts, and it is therefore the approach this book will mainly draw on.

Ancillary Materials and Reception

Before I further outline the arguments of this book, it is first useful to introduce some of the concepts that inform the approach adopted in this study.

Scholars working in the field of reception studies work with the primary assumption that the meaning of a film is not simply determined by its textual features but that there is a variety of contexts that figure and step into the meaning-construction process. Janet Staiger, who developed what she called the ‘historical materialist’ approach, argues throughout her work that the ‘cultural artefacts are not containers with immanent meanings’ since different audiences make different interpretations.⁵⁷ Importantly, reception studies emphasises that differences in interpretations need to be connected to the different contexts in which they are made. As Staiger puts it, ‘variations among interpretations have historical bases for their differences’.⁵⁸ However, these differences ‘are not idiosyncratic but due to social, political, and economic conditions, as well as to constructed identities such as gender, sexual preference, race, ethnicity, class and nationality’.⁵⁹ One of the aims of an analysis therefore becomes to connect interpretations to the con-

ditions in which they are made, and ‘attempt a historical explanation of the event of interpreting a text’.⁶⁰ Similarly, the aim of this book is to connect meanings and interpretations circulating around films to the different contexts and discourses that affected them.

Since reception studies rejects the idea of film as the central site determining its meaning, it refocuses attention from films themselves to the various discursive sites in which meanings and identities of film circulate: sites such as marketing materials, reviews, interviews and publicity stories. Together, these sites propose various ‘meanings by which films can be framed’ and form the environment in which audiences shape their understanding of films.⁶¹ Throughout this book I will collectively allude to these texts that also form the primary data for this book as ‘ancillary materials’ – a term that I borrow from Martin Barker’s essay in which he emphasises the importance of these texts for shaping audience reception.⁶²

Barker argues that ancillary materials need to be analysed as part of the ‘flow of talk around film’. The flow of talk is a relatively broad inter-textual network of information and interpretations circulating around each film. It can include interpretations shaped by face-to-face interactions but also information disseminated in publicity materials, interviews, press kits, etc. He is especially interested in the ‘prefigurative’ function of these texts, the ways in which they ‘constitute more or less patterned discursive preparations for the act of viewing’.⁶³ In the approach Barker advocates, the different public debates and meanings circulating in ancillary materials help to form an overview of the environment in which different audiences variously construct their understanding of films. Barker’s work, however, aims to reach beyond the analysis of ancillary materials and is interested in how audiences themselves construct their understanding of films. Through engagement with different audiences Barker addresses one of the limitations of the historical materialist approach, proponents of which can only build arguments by stressing that ancillary materials do not provide access to meanings constructed by film audiences themselves. As Barbara Klinger points out, such an analysis ‘does not provide a record of audience response’ but helps to ‘reconstruct the semiotic environment in which the text/viewer interaction took place, showing us discourses at work in the process of reception’.⁶⁴ Barker’s work is useful for this study mainly because it outlines several useful terms and approaches to studying ancillary materials, such the umbrella term ‘ancillary materials’ as well as the idea of ‘flow of talk’ as a patterned habitat of meanings. However, it needs to be stressed that this book aims to analyse the flow of talk around films only in

its manifestations in ancillary materials. The data for this book does not include interpretations constructed by audiences themselves, apart from film reviews, which, however, need to be approached as products of ‘one particular *kind* of audience [original emphasis]’.⁶⁵

It also needs to be remembered that ancillary materials are complex documents with many claims and interpretations that can even be at odds with each other. In his book *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s*, Thomas Austin looks at how a multiplicity of meanings is in fact encouraged by the industry itself in promotional campaigns, with the aim of maximising audiences for films. He approaches popular films as what he calls ‘dispersible texts’ that aim to provide various ‘avenues of access’ to diverse audiences.⁶⁶ The term is most obviously useful when applied to films which, through tie-ins and cross-promotion, make use of the numerous branches of large international conglomerates to maximise profit. However, Austin applies the term to a wider array of films in order to indicate the variety of meanings that marketing campaigns strive to construct around films. A dispersible text, as he defines it, consists of a multitude of elements that are developed by ‘fragmentation, elaboration and diffusion’.⁶⁷ These avenues of access target different audiences that are divided into different ‘knowable’ groups and thus often encourage diverse interpretations that would appeal to each group.

Austin’s perspective of popular films as being ‘fragmented’ into elements draws on Barbara Klinger’s work on promotion in which she looks at how the production of film involves construction of its several ‘consumable identities’. According to her, production of a film involves fragmenting the film into many segments ‘with an inter-textual destiny’.⁶⁸ These segments are then ‘re-narrativised’ – developed during promotion via diverse sets of narratives – as stories from the set, interviews and other stories.⁶⁹ For different audiences, the meanings and enjoyment of films can therefore be variously connected to a specific genre, or a star, elements of the *mise-en-scène*, or a novel accompanying the release of the film. Importantly, however, Austin highlights that the different identities circulating around a single film do not strive to maintain a consistent set of meanings, but they are instead driven by the goal of broad dispersion. Ancillary materials will therefore often make somewhat contradictory claims. For example, he looks at the diverse connections and identities that were constructed in the promotional campaign of *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) by highlighting ‘generic, canonical and populist elements’.⁷⁰ Similarly, he analyses how *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Francis

Ford Coppola, 1992) was in ancillary materials both connected to and distanced from the label of horror in order to target audiences of different tastes and preferences.⁷¹ Austin's work is a reminder of the complexity of the network of meanings weaved around films and of the need to approach ancillary materials as texts full of competing interpretations.

It is precisely the interest in the variety of interpretations that makes reception studies ideal for exploring the discursive construction of national cinema as described above. Even if materials might propose several interpretations of films, these differences should be treated as meaningful as they indicate the diversity of value systems through which films are approached. In fact, what reception studies often concerns itself with is what Pierre Bourdieu called the 'symbolic production' of films. As he says, this is 'the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work'.⁷² Scholars have paid special attention to reviews as 'gate-keepers or guardians of specific taste formations'⁷³ and the hierarchies of value they indicate to be at work in particular historical moments.

Of course, these different value systems do not simply exist independently from each other. In the flow of talk around films, interpretations (or rather proponents of them) will struggle for dominance. As Bourdieu argued, differences in taste are bound to issues of power and authority. In fact, Bourdieu points out in his work that class differences are closely tied not only to unequal distribution of economic capital but also of cultural capital – sets of knowledge and skills that are acquired through education, upbringing and socialisation and which are mobilised in the consumption and appreciation of cultural artefacts.⁷⁴ Furthermore, not only are these differences products of power relations, they are also used to reproduce and justify these power relations in return. Therefore, dominant groups will refer to their superior tastes to reaffirm their authority while subordinate tastes also define themselves in opposition to the legitimate taste. As Andy Willis points out, 'taste formations are not simply produced out of the interests of a specific class or social group, but out of the struggles *between* classes and groups'.⁷⁵

While Bourdieu's theories approach the class-based taste formations as largely homogenous, others have extended his concepts into more nuanced analyses of film reception. Austin shows that taste formations are not simply equated with specific class.⁷⁶ He argues that a variety of cultural resources and practices play a part in shaping audiences' tastes, for example affiliations with specific fan communities or associations with political movements.⁷⁷ Mark Jancovich also

draws attention in his work to the variety of values circulating in different publications and the taste formations they aim to address. In his work on *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), for example, he looks at the diverse ways in which different groups define the generic identity of the film in relation to the category of ‘horror’. As he says, since different publications address different audiences, they have different agendas and even ‘employ wildly different notions of cinematic value’.⁷⁸ In the end, Jancovich maintains that horror simply does not have a single meaning or definition; different publications construct the generic identity of *The Silence of the Lambs* in ‘competing ways as they seek to identify with or distance themselves from the term, and associate different texts with these constructions of horror’.⁷⁹ At the same time, the definitions of horror become part of different groups’ struggles for authority ‘as these groups compete for legitimacy of their definition in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of their claim to cultural authority’.⁸⁰ As a result, Jancovich argues that ‘Examining a range of publications addressing a variety of readerships will reveal very different interests and preoccupations in any given film, and even clarify the context within which these publications are themselves meaningful as texts’.⁸¹

Indeed, the importance of analysing a variety of publications and the different notions of value they employ is underlined especially by the extent to which these struggles for authority can be glimpsed in discourses about Czech film criticism itself. A notion that has been rearticulated in Czech media for several decades now is that Czech criticism is in crisis. For instance, a common criticism is directed at the commercialisation or ‘tabloidisation’ of writing about film in mainstream press. These debates often establish the difference between the ‘reviewer’ (*recenzent*) and the ‘critic’ (*kritik*), with the former addressing an ‘ordinary’ reader while the latter offers a deeper analysis and evaluation of the film’s qualities. These struggles for differentiation often rely on the common binary opposition of individual expression vs. commerce. In the environment of Czech film criticism, the commercial interests of publications, it is argued, seem to push the critic into compromising their criteria and modes of evaluation. Instead of serving the criteria of artistic value, ‘reviewers’ are seen to serve the broad readership of their publications. This was for instance articulated in an interview broadcast as part of the programme *Konfrontace Petra Fischera* (ČT art, 2014–2017). In an episode called ‘The Critical State of Criticism’, the host and film critic Petr Fischer interviews another critic, Darina Křivánková. One of the main points towards which Fischer returns in the discussion is the problem of ‘serving the reader’ that

he presents as antithetical to the ideal form of criticism that serves the artwork itself.

In this line of argument, it is not only cinema itself that has been compromised by the transition to market economy but the institution of film criticism as well. In the introduction to Halada's book, Jan Lukeš says that 'The pull of the media towards entertainment, or even tabloid, pushed the critic not unfrequently into the role of mere advertising agent – and it needs to be said, many of them adjusted to it quite willingly'.⁸² Similarly, Helena Bendová, writing for *Cinepur* in an article titled 'Errors of Criticism', finds writing in mainstream publications to be mostly 'hidden advertisement' of films.⁸³ According to her it appears that 'critics from publications for "ordinary" spectators (from daily newspapers to monthly film magazines) have become victims of auto-censorship that imposes on them different than artistic criteria of evaluation and turns them in essence into promoters of values dictated by the film industry'.⁸⁴ Another critic, Zdeněk Holý, writing in the same issue of the magazine, also finds that texts published in daily newspapers and popular magazines are 'the extended arm of the market, builders of the tastes of their audiences'.⁸⁵ I perceive these attempts to police the boundaries between 'mainstream' and 'serious' criticism to be functioning similarly to the different definitions of genre Jancovich analyses in his work. Critics define the role and boundaries of criticism in different ways as they struggle to distance themselves from lower forms and therefore establish their own authority.

The concerns about a crisis of criticism are of course not specific to the Czech Republic and are not even a recent phenomenon. As Mattias Frey has shown, film critics have repeatedly employed the rhetoric of 'crisis' throughout the history of the medium in order to reassert their relevance and authority.⁸⁶ My interest in this idea of crisis therefore lies mainly in the struggles of different groups for authority that it reveals. It needs to be pointed out, however, that questions of quality and standards of Czech criticism are not necessarily always targeted at the mainstream side of criticism. It is often argued that 'serious' evaluations of cinema are also lacking (for instance in Bendová and Holý). Quite often participants in these debates question whether criticism even exists in the ideal form in the Czech Republic. 'Criticism' in these debates therefore often represents a sort of utopic ideal towards which cinematic writers should strive but which is not allowed to thrive in the current environment of Czech media. More importantly for this book, following the work of Jancovich and Klinger and others, I approach the different publications as addressing audiences of different tastes and therefore exercising

different notions of value, instead of seeing one or the other as an inherently more or less valid evaluative criteria.

At the same time, however, it is also my aim to question some of the unspoken assumptions the more ‘serious’ taste formations often rely on in their claims to superiority. For example, it is interesting in the examples above that Holý (and Fischer implicitly) seems to find more specialised publications outside the mainstream press to be excluded from the process of taste building, of ‘serving the reader’. There is a tendency to overlook the extent to which these publications and texts also address and serve their own audiences (no matter how niche this audience is), since any act of such writing assumes that ‘someone’ will read them (including this book). Similarly, occasionally I argue that some phenomena have been marginalised in ‘serious’ considerations because of the dominance of certain notions of value and relevance in the types of writing with such aspirations. This is especially the case in the second chapter on the reception of *Cosy Dens* (*Pelíšky*; Jan Hřebejk, 1999), in which I look at the family film as a category that is recognised in the industry discourse and mainstream criticism but has attracted little academic attention. It seems to me that it is the reliance on a limited set of interests and justifications in claims to authority, and the ease with which ‘lower’ forms are rejected in these claims, that is also behind the lack of academic work on contemporary Czech cinema.

The ancillary materials collected for this study therefore appeared in a wide variety of publications, ranging from daily newspapers *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, *Lidové noviny*, *Právo*, *Hospodářské noviny*, weekly magazines *Týden*, *Reflex*, *Respekt*, *Instinkt*, monthly magazines *Cinema*, *Premier*, *Literární noviny*, *Cinepur*, critical quarterlies *Revolver Revue* and *Film a doba* as well as internet portals such as *Aktuálně.cz* and *MovieZone*. These publications and portals vary quite considerably in their target audiences, from mainstream newspapers *Mladá Fronta Dnes* and *Lidové noviny*, to publications aiming to represent the quality side of the press (for example *Respekt*), and publications focusing on more specialised cultural criticism (*Literární noviny*, *Cinepur*, *Revolver Revue*). They also employ varying styles in their reviewing practices, with those published in mainstream publications being usually much shorter than the quite extensive analyses spanning several pages in *Cinepur*, *Film a doba*, or *Revolver Revue*.

The texts collected for the purpose of this study also varied: they comprise interviews, gossips, previews, reviews, posters, images, press kits and opinion pieces. These texts are naturally written for different purposes, audiences and at different

times. The most evident difference is perhaps the one between a promotional article published before the film's release and a review reflecting on the act of viewing. The chapters that follow largely attempt to analyse pre-release materials separately from reviews in order to take these differences into account. However, it should be noted that all these texts are considered to be relatively equally valuable for the purpose of a discourse analysis. They all participate in the dissemination of meanings and interpretations of films, which is what this study is primarily interested in.

I decided to focus especially on printed and online materials which were easier to locate on the internet or in archives and libraries rather than audiovisual materials broadcast on television or radio. Furthermore, I made the decision to exclude evaluations and comments from the internet portal Czecho-Slovak Film Database (ČSFD) from the analysis. ČSFD is in concept similar to the Internet Movie Database; it allows registered users to rate and 'review' films in short comments. While the inclusion of these comments can be justified on the premise that, as Jancovich argues, any act of criticism is a claim 'to participate in the process by which cultural value is defined and distinguished',⁸⁷ I did not include this data for several reasons. The first one is simply practical – the data would be much larger. Secondly, several films analysed in this book were released before ČSFD was founded in 2001 and therefore the nature of these comments as retrospective would have to be taken into account. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the timeframe in which the comments on the portal were made. The date of the original comment is provided but comments and ratings can be edited. It seems that they are more usefully regarded as part of the flow of talk and variety of meanings circulating at the specific moment in which they are read. Therefore, they are more suitable for an analysis of 'synchronic' differences in interpretations rather than 'diachronic' developments that this book is also interested in.⁸⁸

The chapters of this book comprise close case studies of four films – *Kolya* (*Kolja*; Jan Svěrák, 1996), *Cosy Dens*, *Walking Too Fast* (*Pouta*; Radim Špaček, 2009) and *Identity Card* (*Občanský průkaz*; Ondřej Trojan, 2010). These films were released over the span of almost fourteen years (1996, 1999, 2009 and 2010, respectively). An analysis of their reception therefore allows me to look at the changes that notions of value and quality underwent in the period between the release of each film. Around eighty texts were collected for each film. However, due to the large amount of meanings and materials circulating around a single film in different media, an analysis of them needs to be selective. As Barker points out,

facing such an amount of data can lead to chaos rather than a clear and focused analysis. One of the tasks of making sense of such an array of data is to identify patterns and the ‘discursive terrain’ these materials construct – to what extent ‘they are patterned, drawing on the same sources, and using the same range of concepts, questions, and judgements’.⁸⁹ These materials were therefore subsequently coded in a search for such patterns. This analysis therefore again needs to acknowledge its partiality rather than claim to explore the full scope of the different meanings in circulation around films in specific times.

Each chapter is dedicated primarily to one film, its promotion and reception around the time of release. However, the discursive terrains constructed around these films are also compared in the course of the book to explore the films’ shifting positions in hierarchies of value as well as the changes and developments in evaluative and interpretative strategies appearing in their ancillary materials. Furthermore, despite the often exclusive emphasis that scholars such as Klinger place on ancillary materials, I will occasionally look at the content of films themselves. As several scholars have argued, it is not the case that contexts simply determine the meanings constructed. Instead, the construction of meaning is a process in which the reader, the film, a variety of contexts, as well as ‘operations of power’, interact.⁹⁰ In some limited cases I therefore go beyond the ancillary materials to the films to better clarify ‘what might be facilitating the reading’ under analysis.⁹¹ The aim is not, however, to invalidate any specific interpretations, instead to better explain the terrain in which they were made. In my descriptions of films, therefore, I try to avoid using terms that would indicate subjective value judgements.

Czech Retro Film and the Middlebrow

This study arose from an idea for a project that set out to analyse the ways in which films interact with the process of ‘coming to term with the past’, specifically the communist past. In line with the historical materialist approach, it was to analyse the shifting and developing evaluations of historical representations in films released from the fall of the communist regime in 1989 until 2014. The project in the end took a turn into a slightly different direction, mainly because of the silence that seemed to surround post-socialist Czech cinema at the time. While the book still explores how critics approach the issue of historical representation to some extent, it currently focuses more on the discursive category of Czech cinema as

defined above. However, the initial stages of the research affected considerably the chosen case studies, as the narratives of all the analysed films are set during the period of socialism. Due to the narrow range of thematic concerns the chosen films represent, as well as the very small sample out of the whole corpus of Czech films produced during the period that this book explores, it again needs to be stressed that this study does not claim to reveal an exhaustive variety of positions towards post-communist Czech cinema.

A similar approach to the one originally envisioned for this project has previously been adopted by Karina Hoření in a chapter on the reception of films set during socialism. She identifies 'repression and conflict with the regime' as the key theme in these films, or rather a theme that 'critics seek', but she does not aim to connect these readings to the socio-historical contexts in which they were made.⁹² Therefore, while originally setting out to analyse the reception of films released between 1989 and 2012, she merely admits that films made in the 1990s were not commonly interpreted around this theme, without trying to explain this absence.⁹³ In the third chapter I will in fact argue that 'coming to terms with the communist past' is a theme that rose to prominence in evaluative strategies of mainstream critics in 2000s due to several reasons, especially the growing debates about the dangers of 'nostalgia' for communism.

Furthermore, it has often become the case that if post-socialist Czech cinema attracts any academic attention, it is usually the films representing the different national pasts that are looked at. They have been analysed, for example, to some extent in the series *Film and History* co-published by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. A few chapters on post-communist historical film appeared in the anthology *Film a dějiny 4: Normalizace*,⁹⁴ and a whole separate collection in the series was dedicated to them later in *Film a dějiny 6*.⁹⁵ Some attention was paid to these films in Ewa Mazierska's book *European Cinema and Intertextuality*,⁹⁶ and more recently also in Luboš Ptáček's monograph *Umění mezi alegorií a ideologií [Art Between Allegory and Ideology]*.⁹⁷ Similarly, Veronika Pehe has analysed them in her book *Velvet Retro* as part of the post-communist 'memory cultures' in the Czech Republic.⁹⁸ The growing interest in representations of past in Czech film is definitely an interesting phenomenon in itself. On the other hand, this narrow focus on 'films on the past' in this book and in other academic literature remains one of the limitations of existing work on post-communist Czech cinema and is an incentive for further research that needs to look at a broader array of films from Czech post-communist cinema.

All the films analysed in this study have been labelled as ‘retro films’ by some writers in ancillary materials.⁹⁹ While this label tends to be used mainly to indicate a film’s setting in the past, there is very little work on its use in Czech context and how it interacts with or is defined against other genres, especially the ‘historical film’. Indeed, some above mentioned publications write about these films as ‘historical films’. However, as the following chapters show, this is a label that the films were intentionally avoiding to some extent in promotional campaigns. In my data the label of retro also strongly intersects with what has been called the ‘pretty Czech’ (*hezký český*) style.¹⁰⁰ While the term ‘pretty Czech’ was originally applied to Jan Svěrák’s film *The Elementary School* (*Obecná škola*; 1991), which was promoted with the tagline ‘pretty, Czech, cheerful, sound, inflammable’, it has been applied more broadly to describe the style of films like *Kolya*, *Cosy Dens* and others, which through their reliance on a mix of humour and drama offer conciliatory storylines for broad audiences. The terms ‘retro film’ as well as ‘pretty Czech’ therefore need to be understood as cultural categories with shifting meanings and competing definitions that are, furthermore, intertwined with struggles for distinctions.

An important point about the retro film, and historical representation on film in general, is that in the area of filmmaking it is often tied to claims to relevance, and cultural value. In other words, it tends to represent the ‘quality’ branch of filmmaking. Indeed, such claims to quality appear in the ancillary materials of all the films analysed. At the same time, as I mentioned above, they often also make attempts to distance themselves from the elitist and ‘serious’ connotations the term ‘history’ has. As such, they all can be perceived as representing what has been called middlebrow cinema. In a similar vein, Francesco Pitassio refers to *Kolya* and *Cosy Dens* as ‘popular art-house productions’, which blend ‘the search for a wide audience with the reference to established national aesthetic, political and moral values’.¹⁰¹ It seems to me, however, that the term ‘art-house’ suggests forms of circulation and distribution that would simply not apply to these films in the Czech Republic. I therefore prefer to use the term middlebrow instead.

The ‘middlebrow’ can have a broad range of meanings. Quite often it tends to be associated with social mobility and the class aspirations of audiences.¹⁰² It is therefore not only used to describe texts, but also tastes, audiences and institutions.¹⁰³ Despite the aspirations to legitimacy that middlebrow cinema often shows, it is also connected to ideas of accessibility and broad appeal and can

therefore be treated as part of the ‘popular’. This is the stance I will be adopting throughout this book in general, but especially in the first two chapters, in order to highlight the extent to which a film’s value is negotiated in mainstream criticism in relation to ideas of broad audience appeal. However, as Sally Faulkner argues, middlebrow cinema is cinema that is ‘always in a process of self-affirmation’ against the extremes of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture.¹⁰⁴ On these grounds, she suggests treating the middlebrow as a category separate from the popular.¹⁰⁵ I will more actively differentiate the middlebrow from lower and higher forms in the last two chapters as the concept becomes useful for explaining shifting notions of value, as well as the positions assumed by critics towards certain forms of Czech cinema. In these chapters the term middlebrow (the word ‘midcult’ is more commonly used in the Czech language) strongly overlaps with the term ‘mainstream’, which is just as nebulous. What both terms have in common in these chapters, however, is the way they are used as categories against which other more valuable forms are defined.

The first chapter explores the negotiation of the idea of national traditions in the promotion and reception of an international co-production – *Kolya*. In this chapter I look at how the co-production status affected the interpretative frameworks circulating in ancillary materials and what perceptions and ideas of Czech cinema they construct. As I will show, the film’s ancillary materials heavily centred on the scriptwriter and actor Zdeněk Svěrák to locate the film’s Czechness. In these texts discourses about Svěrák’s writing style – the humour, kindness and compassion with which he is seen to approach his characters – blend into descriptions of his personality. At the same time, they are represented as a particularly Czech set of values. Indeed, when *Kolya* was released, these characteristics also became the basis for the evaluative strategies critics applied to the film. This chapter analyses the debates about the film’s value and national identity by drawing on Metter Hjort’s concept of ‘politics of recognition’, which considers how discourses about national ownership of films are also intertwined with the goals and hopes of seeing one’s national culture recognised abroad.¹⁰⁶ The argument is that the film’s reception was strongly marked by hopes about international recognition of censorship-free national cinema on the one hand and by concerns about the quality of Czech productions after 1989 on the other.

In the second chapter I move on to analyse the promotion and reception of *Cosy Dens*. As I will show, the ancillary materials constructed the appeal of *Cosy*

Dens using similar terms to those that were present in the flow of talk around *Kolya*. Again, we find the debates about the film in mainstream publications focusing on its blend of comedy and drama. In this chapter, I specifically argue that notions of quality circulating around the retro film in the mainstream press are constructed around ideas of escapism and pleasure for family audiences.

The phenomenon of films targeting family audiences has rarely attracted attention in academic works on Czech cinema. The aim of the second chapter is therefore also meant to be an encouragement for potential further explorations of the shapes of the family film in Czech cinema. All the chapters in this book are concerned with struggles between different taste formations. However, the first two chapters especially highlight how different taste formations define themselves in opposition to each other to establish their legitimacy. If some critics were able to validate escapist pleasures by for example connecting the film's tone to ideas of cinema heritage, opinions expressed mainly in publications with more 'serious' aspirations employed different notions of value. I observe that critics aiming to distinguish themselves from mainstream criticism have a tendency to dismiss popular pleasures as an influence of the old socialist ideology, which in such evaluations implicitly becomes a sign that they are unworthy of closer inspection. The second chapter therefore suggests that it is also the reliance on this dismissal of the popular in claims to authority that lies behind the exclusion of the family film from histories of Czech cinema.

The third chapter focuses on a film that was released more than ten years after *Cosy Dens – Identity Card*. While *Identity Card* is repeatedly presented in ancillary materials as a similar type of film, the interpretations that circulate around it are quite different. This chapter places this shift in the context of concerns over 'nostalgia for communism' that is seen to be perpetuated by popular media (and especially television in the ancillary materials analysed). I will argue that post-communist nostalgia became a topical reference that filmmakers responded to in aspirations to prestige, and critics adopted it in their claims to cultural authority. At the same time, this chapter also looks at the shifting notions of value that the broad adoption of this topical reference suggests. By the time *Identity Card* was released, many evaluative strategies that were used by critics to validate *Kolya* and *Cosy Dens* were deemed outdated. Even critics writing for mainstream publications began to adopt evaluative terms similar to those previously championed especially by critics aiming to represent more 'serious' tastes. I will therefore also analyse this difference in evaluative strategies

as a shift in perceptions about the nature and role of Czech retro film. As I will argue, this role is constructed in *Identity Card*'s ancillary materials in opposition to the 'popular'.

This idea is further developed in the final chapter that looks at the promotion and reception of *Walking Too Fast*. In many respects, *Walking Too Fast* is not a 'popular' film at all; it was not a massive box office hit at the time of its release and it has not built the kind of following the other three films have since their release. However, it is precisely the film's difference from 'popular' and 'mainstream' cinema(s) that were at the centre of efforts to establish the film's value. The film's ancillary materials construct several identities for the film, and I especially focus on the film's identity as a genre film and a 'smart' film. Both of these identities were constructed in ancillary materials in order to differentiate *Walking Too Fast* from the 'mainstream' Czech film, and I look at several constructs of the mainstream circulating in media discourses. As I will argue, different taste formations employ these ideas of Czech mainstream as 'negative benchmarks' in their evaluations of the film and the state of Czech cinema in general.¹⁰⁷ In some accounts the negative benchmark is represented by unsophisticated low comedies. However, in other cases these are presented as middlebrow conciliatory generic hybrids that with the goal of appealing to broad audiences combine elements of comedy and drama. With the mainstream being defined as appealing to broad audiences, generically unfocused, not overly sophisticated, and rather 'Czech', critics also demonstrate their preferences for different types of cinema – especially foreign genre films and the festival film. I will return to summarise the implications of these canons for further study of Czech cinema in the conclusions of this book.

Note on Translations

Apart from English film titles, all translations from Czech in this book are mine. Since this study aims to analyse the language and choice of words used in original texts, it was important to me that some elements in translated quotes, such as syntax, remain close to the original. However, in some cases minor adjustments were made to maintain some level of fluency so that these texts are comprehensible in English. These adjustments were always done with the aim of altering the message of the original text as little as possible.

Notes

1. Imre, 'Introduction: East European Cinemas in New Perspectives', xii.
2. *Ibid.*, xii–xiii.
3. Mazierska, 'Eastern European Cinema', 14.
4. Portuges and Hames, 'Introduction', 3.
5. Imre, 'Introduction: East European Cinemas in New Perspectives', xvii.
6. Pitassio, 'Popular Nostalgia', 215.
7. To some extent this book addresses a gap previously noticed by Pitassio who bemoaned the lack of attention on the 'sense-making practices of criticism and research' in existing work on Czech cinema (Toby Miller, quoted in Pitassio, 'Popular Nostalgia', 216). However, Pitassio's essay on popular post-communist Czech cinema still remains relatively centred on film texts themselves. Despite considering the contexts of production these films were made in, and even considering the films' circulation on television, Pitassio spends considerable time finding thematic similarities between films made before and after the Velvet Revolution and does not look at the variety of meanings circulating around these films for different groups.
8. Hames, 'The Czech and Slovak Republics', 71.
9. Halada, *Český film devadesátých let*, 196.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Portuges and Hames, 'Introduction', 5.
12. Hames, 'The Czech and Slovak Republics', 71.
13. Halada, *Český film devadesátých let*, 214.
14. *Ibid.*
15. For example in Hames, 'The Czech and Slovak Republics', and Čulík, *Jací sme*, 583–84.
16. Čulík, *Jací sme*, 24.
17. *Ibid.*, 585.
18. Willis, 'Cultural Studies and Popular Film', 189.
19. Hanáková, 'Imagining National Identity in Czech Postcommunist Cinema', 156.
20. Skupa, 'Film po sametu', 56.
21. Bláhová, 'České hubičky na vývoz', 80.
22. *Ibid.*, 88–89.
23. *Ibid.*, 89.
24. *Ibid.*, 83.
25. *Ibid.*, 83–84.
26. Hjort and Mackenzie, 'Introduction', 3.
27. Hjort, 'On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism', 12.
28. Imre, 'Introduction: Eastern European Cinema: From *No End* to the End (As We Know It)', 3–4.
29. Higson, 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema', 69.
30. Danielis, 'Česká filmová distribuce po roce 1989', 59.
31. Portuges and Hames, 'Introduction', 3.
32. Hjort and Petrie, 'Introduction', 15.
33. Pitassio, 'Popular Nostalgia', 219.
34. Bláhová, 'Český film se prodává těžko', 3.
35. Pavel Strnád, quoted in *ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Halada, *Český film devadesátých let*, 196.

38. Lange, 'The Production and Circulation of Films from the EU New Member States (1996–2012)'.
39. Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema*, 9–12.
40. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', 20.
41. Ibid.
42. Lukeš in Halada, *Český film devadesátých let*, 11.
43. Ibid., 10.
44. Ibid.
45. Fila, 'Zdejší filmaři', 9.
46. Ibid.
47. Elsaesser, 'The German Cinema as Image and Idea'.
48. Nāripea and Trossek, 'Foreword', 7.
49. Ostrowska, Pitassio and Varga, *Popular Cinema in East Central Europe*.
50. For an overview of the different uses of the word 'popular' in relation to film, see Dyer and Vincendeau, 'Introduction', but also Hollows and Jancovich, 'Introduction'.
51. 'Přehledy, statistiky'. Unie filmových distributorů website.
52. Ibid. The pandemic-affected years 2020 and 2021, on the other hand, recorded the lowest numbers, 6.3 million and 7.1 million, respectively. See *ibid.*
53. Danielis, 'Česká filmová distribuce po roce 1989', 68.
54. Křivánková, 'Když do kina, tak na český film', 1.
55. Ibid.
56. Hollows and Jancovich, 'Introduction', 4.
57. Staiger, *Interpreting Films*, xi.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 81.
61. Barker, 'News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and Other Ancillary Materials', 7.
62. Ibid., 3.
63. Ibid.
64. Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, xx.
65. Barker, 'News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and Other Ancillary Materials', 3.
66. Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, 29.
67. Ibid.
68. Klinger, 'Digressions at the Cinema', 9.
69. Ibid., 14.
70. Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, 50.
71. Ibid., 114–33.
72. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 37.
73. Jancovich, 'Genre and the Audience', 38.
74. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
75. Willis, 'Cultural Studies and Popular Film', 184.
76. Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, 20.
77. Ibid.
78. Jancovich, 'Genre and the Audience', 37.
79. Ibid., 43.
80. Ibid.

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81. Ibid., 38.
 82. Lukeš in Halada, *Český film devadesátých let*, 10.
 83. Bendová, 'Omyly kritiky'.
 84. Ibid.
 85. Holý, 'Mystická louže'.
 86. Frey, *The Permanent Crisis of Film Criticism*.
 87. Jancovich, 'Genre and the Audience', 37.
 88. Klinger, 'Film History Terminable and Interminable'.
 89. Barker, 'News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and Other Ancillary Materials', 8.
 90. Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, 2.
 91. Staiger, *Perverse Spectators*, 163.
 92. Hoření, "'Žádná sladkobolná selanka'", 548.
 93. Ibid.
 94. Kopal, *Film a dějiny 4*.
 95. Ptáček and Kopal, *Film a dějiny 6*.
 96. Mazierska, *European Cinema and Intertextuality*.
 97. Ptáček, *Umění mezi alegorií a ideologií*.
 98. Pehe, *Velvet Retro*.
 99. This also includes *Kolya* which received the label despite the fact that the plot of the film takes place only seven years before its release date.
 100. A more precise translation of the term 'hezký český' would be 'nice, Czech'. However, I prefer using 'pretty Czech' instead to indicate a level of playfulness that the term has in the Czech language.
 101. Pitassio, 'Popular Nostalgia', 219.
 102. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 321–28. See also Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*.
 103. Faulkner, 'Introduction'.
 104. Ibid., 8.
 105. Ibid., 6–8.
 106. Hjort, 'Danish Cinema and the Politics of Recognition'.
 107. Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 94.