

Television as the last instrument of power

Normalization meant instilling new norms and values. For these purposes, television was the best tool for reaching the masses. *The Realization Directive of the Main Programme Tasks of Czechoslovak Television*,¹ approved by the Central Committee of the CzCP, put it bluntly:

... to help the party to renew unity on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, fortify the function of the socialist state as the power organ of the working class and working people, use relentless factual propaganda to renew the firm friendship of our nations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, acquaint the viewers with the issues of the international communist and workers' movement, and to strengthen feelings of international solidarity as well as to present our viewers the main tendencies of the politics and economics of the advanced capitalist countries.²

This obvious identification of the medium with ideological propaganda was quite open and propaganda on the TV screens was quite predictable. This is how, among others, Jan Zelenka presented it in his publication, which was intended for the viewing public in the midst of normalization in 1983.

I do not try to hide the fact that we are mindful of keeping the ideological function in the forefront of our attention. Quite openly we serve the socialist society, we want the ideas and policies of the Communist Party to reach the awareness of our viewers, to help them identify with them it and realize the tendencies, problems of life within our country, as well

¹ ['Realizační směrnice hlavních programových úkolů ČST']

² *Analytical Report on the Political and Ideological Activity of CST since November 1968 and Programme, Organizational, and Cadre Measures* ['Rozborová zpráva o politickoideovém působení ČST od listopadu 1968 a programových, organizačních a kádrových opatřeních'], p. 8, in Cysařová 1998b: supplement.



FIGURE 12.1 Director and his author. Jan Zelenka (left), director of CST during the 'normalization' period 1969–1989 and Jaroslav Dietl, the most prolific screenwriter of CST. The photo captures them during the shooting of the New Year's Eve Show The Fierce and Playful New Year's Eve [*Silvestr hravý a dravý*]. (© Jiřina Cynibulková, 1978).

as the outside world, and to understand the essential importance of the unity of socialist partnership.

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The viewers knew and understood the code of this communication propaganda quite well – the vocabulary, style, figures of speech, formulations, and ideas attacked them from all sides, not just from the TV or film screens. Nobody was surprised when documentaries like *Confession*³(1971), which told the story of exemplary communist party members, were aired as well as others of this kind (*Current Questions on the Development of Our Society*,⁴

³ ['Vyznání']

⁴ ['Aktuální otázky rozvoje naší společnosti']



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1980; *Leninism: Everlasting Doctrine*,⁵ 1980). These films served as blatant propaganda of communist ideas; they were examples of how the viewers should think and behave. Such examples, naturally, also came from the Soviet television output, such as *Viktor Pushkariou, Workman*,⁶ subtitled 'a Portrait of one of the Millions of Soviet Workers', or *All Their Sons*⁷ about Soviet land forces (both from 1987). Apart from documentary and journalistic programmes, which were served on a daily basis (*Speaking of the Conclusions from the 15th CzCP Congress*⁸, 1977), there were also programmes promoting friendship with the Soviet Union, such as the magazine about the Soviet Union *Rendezvous with Friends*⁹ (from 1978). It was common for various cultural events to have a political dimension, such as *Political Song Festival in Sokolov*.¹⁰ The exemplary cooperation with the USSR culminated when the only Czechoslovak (and first non-Soviet) cosmonaut, Vladimír Remek, thanked Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Union in a live broadcast from the Soyuz 28 spacecraft, for the possibility of seeing the Earth from space.¹¹

Another group of programmes is represented by extensive projects praising the role of Communist Party in the context of recent historical developments: 15 episodes of *60 Years of CzCP*¹² (1981), a series of 40 episodes interpreting the history of Czechoslovakia from the communist point of view, *Chronicle of Our Life*¹³ (1985), and mainly three drama series: *Gottwald*¹⁴ (to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the first worker president and dictator, 1986), the 22-episode series *The Natives*¹⁵ (about the coming of age of a young communist, 1988) and the greatest project of CST ever, *The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*¹⁶ (1976–1979). The last-mentioned project is considered an emblematic example of the abuse of dramatic production to present an ideologically distorted interpretation of this period. It introduces a socialist investigator who solves any case, with the verve and commitment of James Bond, and although he has a moment of ideological doubt in the midst of the series, he subsequently

⁵ [*'Leninismus: věčně živé učení'*]

⁶ [*'Dělník Viktor Puškarjov'*]

⁷ [*'Všichni jejich synové'*]

⁸ [*'Hovoříme o závěrech XV. sjezdu KSČ'*]

⁹ [*'Dostaveníčko s přáteli'*]

¹⁰ [*'Festival politické písně Sokolov'*]

¹¹ We should mention here that Remek was the 87th person in space and a citizen of the third country in the world which 'got to see space'. This privilege was of Soviet compensation for the invasion in 1968.

¹² [*'60 let KSČ'*]

¹³ [*'Kronika našeho života'*]

¹⁴ [*'Gottwald'*]

¹⁵ [*'Rodáci'*]

¹⁶ [*'Třicet případů majora Zemana'*]



FIGURE 12.2 Vladimír Brabec as the starring actor of Czechoslovak 'James Bond', major Jan Zeman, in the history-twisting series *The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*. (© Jaromír Komárek, 1976).

realizes his error and once again sets on the 'right' path.¹⁷ The series also caused a number of controversial reactions when it was re-broadcast after 1989; CT decided that it was necessary to create a documentary for each of the episodes explaining 'how things were in reality' and introduced each of them with a debate (*Thirty Returns*,¹⁸ 1999).

For its relentless ideological work, television received many awards from the Party. While in 1969 it was condemned as a counter-revolutionary force, now it was decorated with the highest state orders: the Order of Labour (1973) 'for the contribution to the consolidation of society and fulfillment of the conclusions from the 14th Congress of the CzCP' and the Victorious February Order for its 'outstanding contribution to the building

¹⁷ More in Růžička 2005; Bílek 2013.

¹⁸ ['Třicet návratů']



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FIGURE 12.3 Director of CST Jan Zelenka introduces the first and only
Czechoslovak cosmonaut, Vladimír Remek, in the *Seat for the Guest* programme.
(© Vlasta Gronska, 1982).

of a socialist country'. In 1988, in the last full year of Czechoslovak
communism, the secretariat of the Central Committee gave thanks to the
'increased awareness of television viewers related to the work of the party
organs and organizations'.¹⁹ Jan Zelenka²⁰ himself was honoured and in the
1980s he was invited to become a candidate of the Central Committee of the
CzCP (1981), before receiving membership in 1986 (Bednařík 2015: 124).
Aside from his ideological reliability and managerial competence he created
and at first also hosted programmes such as *Seat for the Guest*²¹. '*Seat for
the Guest* proves that we have top elites among our intelligentsia and that
these people are connected with the working classes and serve our Party',
wrote Zelenka.

¹⁹ 25 February 1988 material from the Secretariat of the CC CzCP.

²⁰ [Řád práce] (1973), [Řád Vítězného února] (1983).

²¹ ['Křeslo pro hosta']

Watching such personalities on the TV screen is compelling. Live broadcasts about the heroes of the socialist workforce are indeed also powerful. Thus, we show on the TV News each evening the exemplary workers, foremen, and engineers whose ability to deal with economic hardships sets an example for others or, even, a pretext for the criticism of those lagging behind. People like seeing good examples.

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Both the authorities and TV managers were pleased with the ideological development of TV programming.

However, the satisfactory relationship between television and its viewers was to be reached in another way. Political and propaganda-based content was not attractive to viewers. The nation, its members fleeing to the privacy contained behind the fences of their weekend houses, would be instead engaged by either entertainment programmes (such as the great New Year's Eve vaudevilles or a copy of the East German show *Ein*

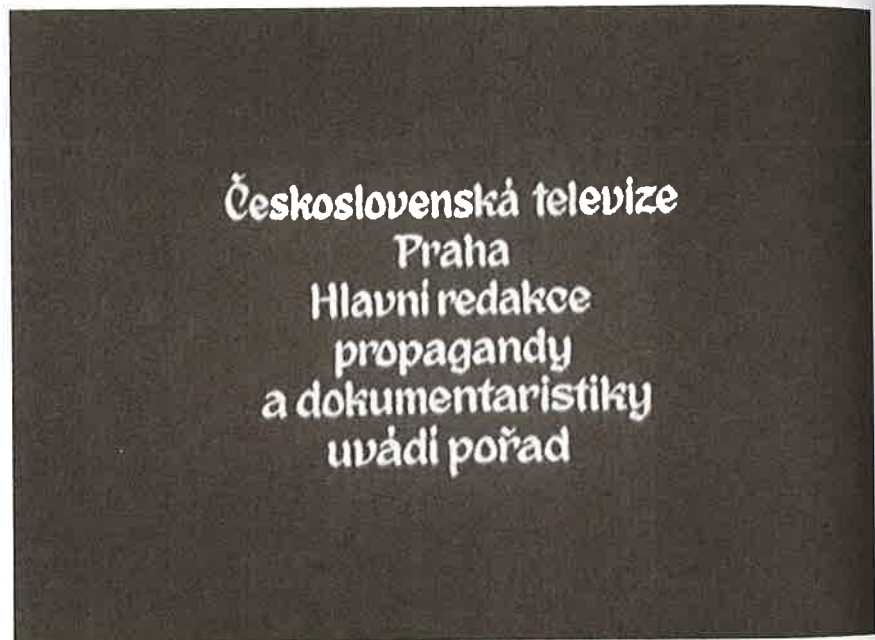


FIGURE 12.4 *Caption introducing one of the CST documentary series at the beginning of the normalization period. It says: 'Czechoslovak Television Prague, Main Department of Propaganda and Documentary Production presents ...' Propaganda was at that time an open form of communication. (Screenshot from The house in Vladislavova Street or the history of The Burgher Hall ['Dům ve Vladislavově ulici aneb historie Měšťanské besedy']). (Source: APF CT, 1973).*

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the CST documentary series at the time: 'Czechoslovak Television Prague, Documentary Production presents ... Communication. (Screenshot from The Burgher Hall [Dům ve Vladislavově] APF CT, 1973).



FIGURE 12.5 One of the many political debates on the CST screen, here called (somewhat paradoxically) the Free Tribune. (© J. Šimek, 1982).

Kessel Buntés called *Televarieté*), or by fairy tales for adults – the TV series. These shows were original dramatic output, created and appreciated at home long before Brazilian telenovelas and American soap operas invaded TV screens after the fall of the communist regime. Quite incredibly, CST created 280 series catering for a whole spectrum of interests and tastes in the



FIGURE 12.6 *Televarieté* (1971–1997) – entertainment show inspired by the East German TV show *Ein Kessel Buntes*. In the foreground are its hosts and authors Vladimír Dvořák and Jiřina Bohdalová. (© Miroslav Pospíšil, 1977).

course of its existence, some of which became quite iconic in Czechoslovakia. Some of them are worth a closer look as they represent specific functions.

The first of these functions was direct politicization, which would comprise the above-mentioned works.

But the second function was that of direct apoliticization, or depoliticization. Here belongs the plethora of television serial drama productions, ranging from comedic series about relationships, through historical TV series, all the way to productions for the family and children. Most of these programmes took place in a world familiar to the viewers, for example within the village (*The Cottagers*,²² 1975; *Doctor from the*

²² ['Chalupáři']



...entertainment show inspired by the East
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(© Miroslav Pospíšil, 1977).

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Reserved Property,²³ 1981), the urban city (*There Was Once a House*,²⁴ 1974; *Today in One House*,²⁵ 1981) the family (*Just an Ordinary Family*,²⁶ 1971; *The Novák Dynasty*,²⁷ 1981) or the many various levels of school (e.g. *We All Attend School*,²⁸ 1983; *Third Floor*,²⁹ 1985). Alternatively, other programmes were placed in attractive and exceptional environments, such as the kitchens of luxurious hotels (*Embarrassment of Cook Svatoopluk*,³⁰ 1985), a dam (*Good Water*, 1985), the world of horse racing (*The Great Saddle*, 1982), or behind the scenes of the demanding work of the Prague Ambulance Service (*The Ambulance*,³¹ 1984). Traditionally, popular crime



FIGURE 12.7 *The Cottagers* was one of the first normalization series, about village relationships, which was well tried and tested and popular. Actors from the left: Josef Kemr and Jiří Sovák, dir. František Filip. (© Ivan Minář, 1975).

²³ ['Doktor z vejminku']

²⁴ ['Byl jednou jeden dům']

²⁵ ['Dnes v jednom domě']

²⁶ ['Taková normální rodinka']

²⁷ ['Dynastie Nováků']

²⁸ ['My všichni školou povinní']

²⁹ ['Třetí patro']

³⁰ ['Rozpaky kuchaře Svatopluka']

³¹ ['Sanitka']



FIGURE 12.8 On social and political orders, CST also created series dealing with various types of education – here a photo from the shooting of the series *Third Floor* dedicated to the problems of vocational students. (© Jaroslav Trousil, 1985).

and detective series (e.g. *Prague Panopticon*,³² 1986; *Adventures of Criminalistics*,³³ 1989) built on the time-proven narratives featuring capable and popular detectives or criminal police departments dealing with as utterly apolitical crimes as possible. History series chose topics solely from the nineteenth century, such as *Alexander Dumas Senior*³⁴ (1970) about the French writer, an adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*³⁵ (1972), or the story of a patriotic bourgeois family living in Prague from the nineteenth century, *Bad Blood*³⁶ (1986) which was a follow up to the popular *Marriages of Convenience*³⁷ from 1968.

³² ['Panoptikum města pražského']

³³ ['Dobrodružství kriminalistiky']

³⁴ ['Alexander Dumas starší']

³⁵ ['Jana Eyrová']

³⁶ ['Zlá krev']

³⁷ ['Sňatky z rozumu']



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,³² 1986; *Adventures of* narratives featuring capable agents dealing with as utterly these topics solely from the *Senior*³⁴ (1970) about the tē's *Jane Eyre*³⁵ (1972), or Prague from the nineteenth up to the popular *Marriages*



FIGURE 12.9 Mr. Tau – one of the successful co-production projects for children realized with the West (!) German TV WRD. (1969, 1970–1978, 1988) Here a photo from the shooting of the episode Mr. Tau and the Sorceress. [*Pan Tau a kouzelnice*] (© Josef Vitek, 1977).

³⁸ A significant film which belongs among popular highlights to this day, and not only in Czechia, is *Three Wishes for Cinderella* [*Tři oříšky pro Popelku*] (1973). (Skopal 2016)

³⁹ [*Pan Tau*]



FIGURE 12.10 *Krkonoše Fairly Tales* [*Krkonošské pohádky*] (1973–1984) based on Marie Kubátová's books was the first series with actors for The Bad Time Stories. Actors from the left: František Peterka and Ilja Prachař, dir. Věra Jordánová. (© Ivan Minář, 1974).

how Hansel and Gretel entered a fairy-tale and the fairy-tale characters then entered the real world; *The Visitors*⁴⁰ (1983) was about time travellers who went back in time from 2484 to 1984 to save the planet; and *Circus Humberto* (1988) a spectacular saga about comedians and circus people roaming around Europe.

The third type of series popular at the time could be described as metaphorical. Either by coincidence or design, the series offered analogies which were not overtly political, but viewers could read between the lines and find hidden political meaning in them. The series *F. L. Věk* was an adaptation of the Czech novel by Alois Jirásek written at the turn of the twentieth century. Its author, who was even then one of the nation's most respected writers and one who, in a patriotic and renaissance spirit, mapped

⁴⁰ ['Návštěvníci']



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chař, dir. Věra Jordánová. (© Ivan

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FIGURE 12.11 *Jú* and *Hele* are plush characters, controlled using the principle of black theater in a programme for children called *Your Chum Studio*. [*Studio kamarád*] (1981–1991). Inspiration was found partly in *Sesame Street*. The two characters were created by Stanislav Holý and screenplay writer Alena Jurásková. (© P. Hodan, 1982).

the history of the Czech nation in his literary works, was discredited in the Stalinist era by forceful, communist misinterpretations and the megalomaniac promotion of his oeuvre. *F. L. Věk* is the story of a patriotic Czech who leaves his small town and moves to Prague at the end of the eighteenth century, where he ends up meeting W. A. Mozart and all those who promoted Czech as a spoken language, and longs for equality with the German element there. Work began on a TV adaptation presenting an authentic portrayal of the romantic nature of the nineteenth-century Czech National Revival in the midst of historical Prague shortly before the beginning of normalization,



FIGURE 12.12 *F. L. Věk* (1969), an adaptation of a Czech literary classic, situated at the beginning of the national revival of the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since it was broadcast shortly after the occupation began in 1968, the audience felt a number of parallels. Actors from the left: Radoslav Brzobohatý and Vlastimil Brodský, dir. František Filip. (© Miloš Schmiedberger, 1969).

making it onto TV screens in 1971. The series faced extensive censorship (religious symbols were removed and the whole of Episode 13 was banned), but the authorities did not dare to ban the classic completely. The main characters of the series long for their country's independence and hope that the strong Czech nation will be able to free itself from its shackles. 'The Czech candle has not been extinguished; it is merely asleep!' are the concluding words of the main character. Given the year and political situation this could have been perceived as subversive.

One of the most interesting types of programming from this period are those programmes which were ordered by the regime, but pretended to be apolitical. 'In an ideal situation, an engaging programme was seasoned with elements of propaganda', writes the Head of the Media Studies Department



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at Charles University in Prague, Petr Bednařík (Bednařík 2015: 125a). These works were labelled 'contemporary series'. Propaganda was considered to be television's most valuable offering:

While American producers and authors today admit with resignation that series production in their country is increasingly subject to the pressure of advertising and cheap entertainment, television series in the socialist countries aim, first and foremost, to capture the real problems of contemporary man, his life, and the world he lives in.

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Obviously, the series did not portray reality as it was experienced by many people, but rather an ideological construct created by the regime.⁴¹

The seemingly innocent series *The Woman behind the Counter* (1977), centred on the life of a deli sales assistant named Anna Holubová. The aim of the series was to construct an archetype of the exemplary socialist woman. This character not only manages to do her work with perfection and sorts out various personal problems, but she is, above all, a 'woman of firm moral principles and exceptional personal qualities who enters the lives of the other members of her co-workers through their commonly shared work place' (Marešová 2010: 86). The political awareness of this shopkeeper was emphasised by the fact that she was played by the most ardent of communist actresses, Jiřina Švorcová. She, as well as the heroine the actress created, immediately became a celebrity and an icon.

The idyllic portrayal of a well-stocked supermarket had little bearing on reality. Under communism, shoppers had to queue to buy exotic fruit, or sleep in front of shops in order to buy a piece of furniture in the morning before it sold out. Alternatively, friends would help them get some goods under-the-counter. The series was bordering on the absurd when, in the fourth episode, the heroine received an accidental delivery of two thousand chocolate bunnies, or in the tenth episode, where she complained that she had so many bananas that she did not know where to put them. A shop with such a politically conscious heroine was a utopia or maybe even a dream for some, but by no means did it resemble reality. The British-Czech scholar, Jan Čulík, has argued that: 'The main purpose of this TV series was to legitimize the post-invasion regime. *The Woman behind the Counter* tried hard to construct the illusion that the supporters of the post-invasion regime were in

⁴¹ More in (Carpentier-Reifová, Bednařík, Dominik 2013; Reifová, Bednařík 2008a; Kopal 2005, 2014, 2016, 2018).



FIGURE 12.13 In a number of series the authors attempted so-called soft propaganda – they portrayed incessant office meetings, party offence of all kinds or politics on all levels while the main characters struggled with their own flaws and doubts. This was at least the case in the series directed by Jaroslav Dudek, such as *The Region in the North* (1980). (© Přiba Mrázová, 1980).

fact well-loved members of the Czech national community' (Čulík 2013: 110).

This series was created by Jaroslav Dietl, a skilled scriptwriter who was involved in all major TV series made by Czechoslovak Television from the very beginning. He was a workaholic (having written 27 series, 9 theater plays and 14 film screenplays) and a master of transforming the political into something seemingly apolitical. His series created exemplary socialist characters who had their faults and doubts, but in the end always realized that they were wrong. After the success of the *The Woman Behind the Counter*, he scripted a series about a group of young engineers who were



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trying to perfect a loom (*The Engineer Odyssey*⁴², 1979) and another one about men collecting the harvest (*Tin Cavalry*,⁴³ 1979). Among his other heroes and their environments are, for example, the bandmaster of a miners' music band (*The Dispatcher*,⁴⁴ 1972). Dietl also wrote saga of a glass-maker and his family (*The Sons and Daughters of Jakub the Glass-maker*,⁴⁵ 1984) and TV series about various apolitical officials one of whom who served as the foreman of a collectivized agriculture cooperative (JZD) (*The Youngest of the Hamr Family*,⁴⁶ 1975), another as a chairman of a local national committee (*Man at City Hall*,⁴⁷ 1976) and yet another as the secretary of a regional committee of the communist party in a larger town (*The Region in the North*,⁴⁸ 1980). Regardless of how well they were written, these works discreetly reinforced the idea of socialism and, apart from the two last-mentioned, pretended to focus on their protagonists' personal lives and their relationship to their work. Dietl 'was hired to mask a kind of ambiguity found in society', says Paulina Bren. 'He did it while entertaining the whole nation' (Bren 2010/2013: 293). His series, described by film theoretician Jaromír Blažejovský (Blažejovský 2014),

were successful not because they were propaganda-based, but because they could pretend that they were merely soft propaganda with whose assertions (success of socialist agriculture, of socialist healthcare, of apartment construction ...) and a moderate dose of 'constructive' communal criticism the unprejudiced viewer could identify.

Dietl's TV series starred a number of famous actors and they have remained popular to this day among older viewers. As stated in a newspaper article, 'many representatives of the current Czechoslovak TV series have found their way into the hearts of millions' (Tesár 1983: 29).

The peak of Dietl's career was the series *The Hospital at the End of the City*⁴⁹ (1978 and second series 1981), which, alongside *The Woman behind the Counter*, is considered to be one of the most typical series of the normalization era. The hospital environment (long before *M. A. S. H.* and others made it to Central Europe) offered Dietl an apolitical environment in which to develop characters and follow their transformation. Unlike the main character, Sova, a Senior Consultant and highly respected orthopaedic specialist, the young and flirtatious doctor Blažej turns out to be, despite his

⁴² ['Inženýrský odyssea']

⁴³ ['Plechová kavalérie']

⁴⁴ ['Dispečer']

⁴⁵ ['Synové a dcery Jakuba skláře']

⁴⁶ ['Nejmłodší z rodu Hamrů']

⁴⁷ ['Muž na radnici']

⁴⁸ ['Okres na severu']

⁴⁹ ['Nemocnice na kraji města']

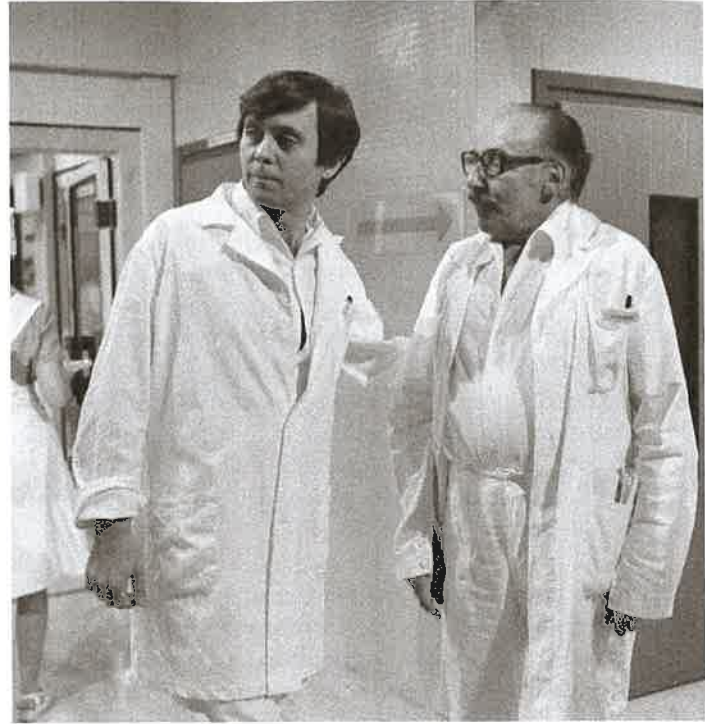


FIGURE 12.14 One of the most popular Czechoslovak series, *The Hospital at the End of the City* (1978 and 1981), also directed by Jaroslav Dudek. (© Příba Mrázová, 1978).

professionalism, a characterless cynic, especially in his treatment of women. While the aging and wise-cracking doctor Štrosmajer is able to stay on top of things, the ambitious doctor Cvach is, on the contrary, a prototype of an ingratiating amateur. These relationships are dominated by the young and personable doctor Alžběta Čeňková, who also serves as the unifying story line. Themes of professionalism, courage, character, and love drive the 20-episode series, while politics receives but a fleeting mention. However, just as *The Woman behind the Counter* did not feature a real supermarket, this series did not feature a typical hospital either. In reality, healthcare in Czechoslovakia was beset by material problems while doctors and nurses weren't known for their upbeat nature. 'Dietl portrayed the hospital as we would like to see it, regardless of the political regime', wrote Petr Bednařík and Irena Reifová. 'A hospital in which we only see the successfully treated patients, where staff are supervised by a strict head nurse, the corridors and the wards are clean, and medicine is always available. This is why the series could easily be screened also in capitalist West Germany' (Bednařík-Reifová 2008: 73).



*...chlovak series, The Hospital at
...ected by Jaroslav Dudek. (© Přebá*

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Today, Dietl's series are considered as an important part of the country's cultural heritage. Some are undeniably dramatic and feature skilful direction and acting. At the same time, they discreetly satisfied political requirements. The playwright and politically persecuted dissident Václav Havel wrote to his wife Olga in the midst of the normalization period (1980):

I have seen some more episodes of this Dietl series which were not as idiotic as the one I mentioned last time, but it is still typical Dietl with all that brings. I would like to write an essay about this phenomenon.⁵⁰

Color television in the black-and-white normalization period

The impression that Czechoslovak normalization culture was comprised of only propaganda and of TV series which twisted reality would, however, be wrong. There was also music, theater, film, and other productions which existed in a kind of grey zone, between the state-sanctioned official culture and the independent world of the underground. Authors and performers who operated in this grey zone were in constant danger; however, they were tolerated. Folk music was another example of alternative culture free from ideological pressure; moreover, through its close links to nature it offered a moderate parallel to the hippy movement. The original and highly personal songwriting of the genre bordered on protest songs, its supporters gathered in thousands at festivals closely observed by the police. Attending these concerts was a political demonstration of a kind.⁵¹ Folk songwriters looked for ways to appeal to their listeners and viewers through ambiguities, parallels, metaphors; some of them managed to maintain a free-thinking attitude even within the officially approved limits.

The authors from this grey zone were permitted to appear on TV, but they were limited to low-profile programmes. They were nevertheless also present in the public sphere. Some of the projects which television had not been able to produce itself for ideological reasons actually eventually made their way onto the TV screens. For example, the six-part documentary series about young couples entitled *Marriage Stories*⁵² (1986) was in fact a filmed sociological experiment. In her longitudinal documentaries, the young

⁵⁰ Václav Havel's letter from October 4, 1980 (Havel 1999: 234).

⁵¹ More in Houda 2014.

⁵² ['Manželské etudy']

director Helena Třeščíková⁵³ followed six couples for six years from the moment of their weddings, meanwhile diagnosing the causes of the frequent break-ups of these marriages. These problems were not only caused by the relationships as such, but the material conditions as well as the entire bleak atmosphere found in society were significant factors, and thus, the documentaries became a critique of the historical moment as a whole. Quite surprisingly, this series was broadcast by Czechoslovak Television as part of the youth programme *Television Youth Club*,⁵⁴ a programme that was always introduced and concluded with a debate on a given topic.

However strict the ideological conditions in CST may have been, Zelenka's management undeniably allowed for the creation of a number of quality dramatic programmes, numerous first-rate theater performances recorded for television (the *Welcome to the Theater*⁵⁵ cycle), as well as concerts of classical music (e.g. the traditional festival Prague Spring or Zelenka's own programme *Music from the Respirium*⁵⁶). He was aware of the fact that the specifics of television allow for more than only entertainment or informational forms of communication, but, at the same time, he knew 'his' audience. As a TV professional, he wanted to offer a diverse programme 'so that the viewer liked his television'" (Zelenka 1983b: 33). To that end, he worked with skilled authors such as the director František Filip, or, apart from Dietl, scriptwriters such as Jiří Hubač, Oldřich Daněk, Petr Zikmund (the pseudonym of Jan Otčenášek), Zdeněk Svěrák,⁵⁷ and others who the StB lists deemed to be threats of the second and third order (Žáček 2003 VI.: 13). The psychological films dealing with alcoholism, trust, and failure such as *The Fall of Icarus*⁵⁸ (1977) and *Birds of Passage*⁵⁹ (1977), honour and friendship (*Unripe Raspberries*,⁶⁰ (1982), the single mother's lot (*The Needle*,⁶¹ (1982)), the defence of one's dignity (*The Platfus Case*,⁶² (1985), or the apocrypha from ancient Greece found in the *The Woman from Corinthus*⁶³ (1986), surely belong to the treasure trove of European TV

⁵³ Helena Třeščíková, one of the most renowned Czech film makers, has used this method throughout her whole career. For her film *René* (2008), in which she followed the originally young offender, she received the so-called European Oscar, Prix Arte European Film Academy Documentary 2008. See also Beaton 2018.

⁵⁴ ['Televizní klub mladých']

⁵⁵ ['Zveme vás do divadla']

⁵⁶ ['Hudba z respiria']

⁵⁷ Zdeněk Svěrák is an actor and screenplay writer of Oscar-nominated film *My Sweet Little Village* [*Vesničko má středisková*] (dir. Jiří Menzel, 1985) and later Oscar-winning film *Kolja* [*Kolja*] (dir. Jan Svěrák, 1996).

⁵⁸ ['Ikarův pád']

⁵⁹ ['Tažní ptáci']

⁶⁰ ['Nezralé maliny']

⁶¹ ['Jehla']

⁶² ['Případ Platfus']

⁶³ ['Žena z Korinta']

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FIGURE 12.15 Among the internationally acclaimed highlights of television dramaturgy, *The Fall of Icarus* (1977) by Jiří Hubač, directed by František Filip. Actor Vladimír Menšík. (© Ivan Minář, 1977).

drama production. They were also praised at international festivals, namely for the individual performances of actors (Jana Brejchová in Plovdiv, Vladimír Menšík in Monte Carlo, etc.). Likewise, the so-called Bratislava Mondays became a phenomenon, broadcasting original TV drama performances from the Slovak central television studio. They were often adaptations of classical theatrical or literary works and maintained an exceptionally high standard.

Moreover, what was ideologically impossible in Prague, became possible in one of the smaller studios of CST. The dramatic productions from Brno were quite remarkable (e.g. *American Tragedy*, 1976) (Hlavica 2012), as were documentary programmes from Ostrava (e.g. the one about traditional crafts *Witnesses of the Past*,⁶⁴ 1985) or from Košice. Due to the participation of some undesirable persons, who often worked under pseudonyms, some projects were intentionally moved to other cities, such as Bratislava. This is

⁶⁴ ['Za svědky minulosti']

how the animated series about two clumsy neighbours, Pat and Mat, was created, or the documentary series which explored new findings about space with the astronomer Jiří Grygar, *Space Windows Wide Open*⁶⁵ (1981). One of its participants was the then politically inconvenient journalist Vladimír Železný (pseudonym Vladimír Silný), who became the general director of the strongest commercial television in the Czech Republic after 1989, TV NOVA.

According to broadcast guidelines, 60 per cent of television output had to consist of content produced in the Eastern Bloc, but for the rest, they were able to screen programmes made in the capitalist world. Czechoslovak viewers were therefore able to watch the English series *The Forsythe Saga*, *The Professionals*, *Dempsey and Makepeace*, *Randall and Hopkirk Deceased*, the French detective series *Comissaire Moulin*, the German *Tatort (Crime Scene)*, the Italian *La Piovra (The Octopus)*, the Australian *All the Rivers Run* and a whole range of films, mainly from France. Local audiences became acquainted with French actors such as Louis de Funés, Jean Paul Belmondo, Alain Delon, Pierre Richard, and the Italians Bud Spencer (Carlo Pedersoli) and Terrence Hill (Mario Girotti). An exceptional occasion for the viewers was the broadcast of the Soviet-American series *The Unknown War*⁶⁶ (1980), which was created in conjunction with the Central Studio for Documentary Film of the USSR and the American company AiR Time International. It was directed by the Soviet pro-regime director Roman Karmen, featuring the American actor Burt Lancaster. In Czechoslovakia, it was viewed by an estimated audience of 7–8 million viewers.

The range of programmes on offer increased dramatically under normalization, and CST reached new heights of creativity, but also technologically.

At the beginning of 1970, the TV studios Kavčí Hory, Prague, came into use, putting an end to the use of provisional spaces in Burgher Hall and elsewhere in Prague. Nine years later, the TV news studio was completed. Slovakia also opened the first two buildings of the Mlýnska Dolina television complex and other studios followed.

The technical parameters of broadcasting were further perfected. A trial run of the station of satellite connections (1971) was launched, transmission facilities were further upgraded, while the design of the new 93 metre-high transmitter on the Ještěd mountain in the form of a rotational hyperboloid received the prestigious architectonic Perrot Prize in France (architect Karel Hubáček, 1973). The transmitter became a well-known landmark. In 1981,

⁶⁵ ['Okna vesmíru dokořán']

⁶⁶ ['Velká vlastenecká válka']

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FIGURE 12.16 A 93 metre-high transmitter on Mount Ještěd near Liberec was built in 1973. The building is a national cultural monument and is on the list of proposed UNESCO objects. (© Martin Štoll, 2014).

radio and television broadcasters experimented with joint stereophonic broadcasts at the final concert of the Prague Spring festival of classical music. Experiments with other information transmissions were carried out, such as teletext (1982 trial, 1988 regular).

The most influential and exciting new feature was, however, the introduction of the second channel of CST and the beginning of color broadcasting. On 10 May 1970, a second channel was launched, representing



FIGURE 12.17 *Old ad on Czechoslovak TV by ORAVA (Source: AMŠ, 1979).*

a kind of 'counterpoint to the first channel' with regard to content and genre'. (Koščo 1981: 39) Its creative team contained a number of people who had been prevented from appearing on TV in the wake of the 1968 invasion. It was this channel that started to experiment with color broadcasting: the first attempt at color transmission was the World Championship in skiing in the High Tatra Mountains on 14 February 1970. Regular color broadcasts began on 9 May 1973, and toward the end of the year even some of the programmes of the first channel were broadcast in colour. Regular color broadcasting on the first channel started also on 9 May, two years later, in 1975. CST also kept pace with new video technologies and from 1980 it recorded its programmes on FUJI half-inch tape.