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## Degeneration of the Homosexual Phantasm in Normalised Czechoslovak Cinema

From Václav Krška's *The False Prince* (1956)  
to Stanislav Strnad's *The Bronze Boys* (1980)

**Zarys treści:** Stosunek kina czechosłowackiego do męskiej nagości i seksualności – w tym zwłaszcza sposób, w jaki sublimowano i przenoszono na ekran fantazmaty homoseksualne – nieintencjonalnie odkrywa „odwrotną stronę” społeczeństwa realnego socjalizmu i zdradza ukryte strategie władzy totalitarnej w zakresie „urządzenia seksualności”. Na przykładzie dwóch filmów: *Krawiec i księżę* Václava Krški z 1956 oraz *Chłopaki z brązu* Stanislava Strnada z 1980 r. możemy prześledzić przemianę i degenerację ekranowych fantazmatów homoseksualnych między drugą połową lat pięćdziesiątych a latami siedemdziesiątymi–osiemdziesiątymi XX w. W utworze Krški – powstałym w czasach wychodzenia ze stalinizmu i socrealizmu – fantazmaty te stanowiły dla twórcy i odbiorców ucieczkę i schronienie oraz rodzaj obrony przed opresywnymi praktykami społecznymi. Natomiast film Strnada – którego kluczowym elementem było odpowiednie zobrazowanie i propagandowe wsparcie czechosłowackich spartakiad – ujawnia, w jaki sposób imaginarium homoseksualne zostało w czasach normalizacji zmanipulowane, zawłaszczone i zaprzęgnięte na użytek dyktatury komunistycznej.

**Outline of content:** The attitude of Czechoslovak cinema towards male nudity and sexuality – in particular the way in which homosexual phantasms were idealised and transferred to the screen – unintentionally reveals the “hidden side” of the society of social realism and uncovers the hidden strategies of totalitarian power in the area of “devices of sexuality”. Using the example of two films, Václav Krška's *The False Prince* from 1956 and Stanislav Strnad's *The Bronze Boys* from 1980, we can trace the transformation and degeneration of the on-screen homosexual phantasms between the second half of the 1950s and the 1970s-1980s. In Krška's work, created in times of recovery from Stalinism and socialist realism, these phantasms were, for creators and consumers alike, an escape, a shelter, and a defence against oppressive social practices. Conversely, Strnad's film, where appropriate illustration and propaganda support of Czechoslovak Spartakiads were a key element, reveals how the homosexual *imaginarium* was manipulated, appropriated, and used in the days of normalisation for the purposes of the communist dictatorship.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kino czechosłowackie, fantazmat homoseksualny, queer cinema, normalizacja w Czechosłowackiej Republice Socjalistycznej, indoktrynacja totalitarna, Václav Krška, Spartakiady, Stanislav Strnad

**Keywords:** Czechoslovak cinema, homosexual phantasm, queer cinema, normalisation in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, totalitarian indoctrination, Václav Krška, Spartakiads, Stanislav Strnad

Although any form of direct representation of homosexuals in the cinema was in the days of communism unimaginable and impossible, as Robin Griffiths rightly noted in respect to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic,<sup>1</sup> and we can extend to all countries in the Soviet sphere of influence, Czechoslovakia should to a certain extent be considered an exception among the countries of the Eastern bloc. František Čáp, Václav Krška and Petr Weigl all worked here: directors who did not hide their homosexual identity, and in whose work we can find, regularly or occasionally, more or less obvious homosexual inspirations. At the same time, it remains a paradox that they enjoyed their greatest artistic successes and gained largest recognition for their films not in times of system thaws or freedom, but during the toughest totalitarian historical conditions: the first one in the years of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, subordinate to the Third Reich, the second during Stalinism and at the end of the 1950s, and the third – in the age of Husák's normalisation.<sup>2</sup>

The homosexual fantasies transferred to the screen can be a soothing and beneficial phantasm for their creators and viewers, creating an imaginative space of personal freedom and the only means of resistance to the oppressive reality. However, appropriated by the authorities, they may become their own antithesis<sup>3</sup> – a nightmarish product of an ideologised reality, a terrifying tool of manipula-

<sup>1</sup> R. Griffiths, "Bodies without borders? Queer cinema and sexuality after the fall", in: *Queer cinema in Europe*, ed. R. Griffiths, Bristol–Chicago, 2008, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> M.C. Putna, "Od Kršky do Trošky. Homosexualita a český film", in: *Homosexualita w dějinách české kultury*, eds. M.C. Putna a kol., Praha, 2013, pp. 455, 459. Petra Hanáková notices the paradoxes connected with the presentation of sexuality and transcending gender stereotypes in Central Eastern European film on the example of the image of women created in the Czechoslovak cinema: "in the period of greatest political control over cinema, the most active female figures were created (although schematic and subordinate to ideology). Meanwhile, films created during the so-called time of freedom – whether we are talking about the Czechoslovak New Wave or productions created after the Velvet Revolution, showing women mainly as sexual objects or restricting them to the roles of mothers and self-sacrificing home makers" ("Šlepa plamka w oku postępu. Wypieranie przestrzeni prywatnej w filmach realizmu socjalistycznego", transl. R. Kulmiński, in: *Doświadczenie i dziedzictwo totalitaryzmu na obszarze kultur środkowoeuropejskich*, eds. J. Goszczyńska, J. Królak, R. Kulmiński, Warszawa, 2011, p. 217).

<sup>3</sup> See a distinction formulated on the ground of literature by Maria Janion, "Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej", in: *Prace wybrane*, vol. 3: *Zło i fantazmaty*, Kraków, 2001, p. 180.

tion, an instrument of uniformisation, incapacitation, and confiscation of intimacy. I will attempt to capture and show this difference on the example of two works of Czechoslovak cinema: Václav Krška's *The False Prince* (*Labakan*) from 1956, and Stanislav Strnad's *The Bronze Boys* (*Kluci z bronzu*) from 1980. The films were created almost a quarter of a century apart, which in the political, social, economic and cultural history of Czechoslovakia was a whole era – marked first by the departure of Stalinism and a less tangible and slower thaw than in other countries of “people’s democracy”, then by liberalisation and democratisation, reaching its peak during the Prague Spring of 1968, suppressed by the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact, and finally by the consolidation and normalisation of the communist system during the reign of Gustáv Husák. In the history of the Czechoslovak cinema, this quarter of a century includes, respectively: the first attempts to withdraw from the doctrine and the pattern of social realism, and a search for new themes and means of expression through the so-called First Wave (or the “Generation 1956”), blocked by party decision-makers during the 1959 Banská Bystrica festival,<sup>4</sup> and then the eruption and great (also international) success of the Czechoslovak New Wave, followed after 1968 by consolidation and normalisation of cinema, which among other things meant negating the achievements of the 1960s, strengthening party control and censorship, and removing the most important New Wave creators.

From a somewhat limited, for our purposes, perspective we can look at this period as a time at the beginning of which we find the film *Silvery wind*,<sup>5</sup> produced

<sup>4</sup> At the conference accompanying the First Czechoslovak Film Festival in Banská Bystrica (22–28 February 1959), the Minister of Education and Culture at the time, František Kahuda, strongly criticised the liberalisation tendencies in Czechoslovak cinema of 1957–1958, manifested e.g. through a departure from socialist realism and critical pursuit of contemporary themes. The attack on filmmakers was prepared in June 1958 at the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, as no. of a broader campaign to “end the cultural revolution”. The four primary targets of the party attack became the films (consequently shelved): *Three Wishes* (*Tři přání*) by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, *Hic Sunt Leones* (*Zde jsou lvi*) by Krška, *The Star Goes South* (*Hvězda jede na jih*) by Oldřich Lipský, and the medium-length *The End of the Clairvoyant* (*Konec jasnovidce*) by Vladimír Svitaček and Ján Roháč. After a conference in Banská Bystrica came a wave of organisational and personnel repression (one of the creative teams was dissolved, a few people were dismissed from the Barrandov film studios, and a few were reinstated, Kadár and Klos received a two-year ban on work, and Krška was to retire, etc.). The party stifled the first symptoms of the thaw and restored the order in cinema, pausing the process of decentralisation and liberalisation for two years. The earlier stylistic and thematic patterns returned to films – themes of ideological confrontation with the West, and the atmosphere of suspicion and fixation on spies. The ice began to crack again with the arrival of the New Wave in the first third of the 1960s – see e.g. J. Lukeš, *Diagnózy času. Český a slovenský poválečný film (1945–2012)*, Praha, 2013, p. 77–83, 96; I. Klimeš, “Filmaři a komunistická moc v Československu. Vzrušený rok 1959”, *Illuminace*, 2004, no. 4, pp. 129–138; “Banská Bystrica 1959. Dokumenty ke kontextům I. festivalu československého filmu”, *Illuminace*, 2004, no. 4, pp. 139–222; *Naplánovaná kinematografie. Český filmový průmysl 1945 až 1960*, ed. P. Skopal, Praha, 2013, p. 56ff.

<sup>5</sup> Original title: *Stříbrný vítr*.

in 1954, stopped by censorship and allowed on the screens only two years later due to a bold scene of naked junior high school students bathing in the river, and at the end there are the “normalisation” films<sup>6</sup> from the 1970s and 1980s, in which the characters are not only usually fully dressed in bed, but also go into the bath or shower in their underwear;<sup>7</sup> between them are the “golden sixties” – cinema which (in both its ambitious, original productions, as well as popular, genre films), was in the world’s avant-garde in terms of bold and undisguised portrayal of nudity and sexuality, also male. The freedom awoken in the mid-1950s (referring to, as in other aspects of the culture recovering at that time, to the interwar national artistic output: on the one hand – in the case of female nudity – for example to Gustav Machaty’s *Ecstasy*,<sup>8</sup> and on the other hand – in terms of male nudity – to Krška and Čáp’s *Fiery summer*<sup>9</sup>) during the New Wave period resulted in a fresh look, sometimes mild and lyrical, more often satirical, unceremonious and cruel, on the “Czech nation between the sheets”. In the bed and under the covers filmmakers discovered archetypes of human existence,<sup>10</sup> and by analysing what was most “domestic” and intimate, they explored the socio-cultural and political reality. However, ideological pressure after 1968 brought these pioneering and unconventional elements first to the level of joviality and folklore,<sup>11</sup> and soon after to banal and prudish normalising and normalisation schemes. As Josef Kroutvor wrote, “covered with a heavy duvet of banality” the small Czech man was waiting for this era of history to pass.<sup>12</sup>

The sinusoid, outlined here in very general terms, of the Czech cinema’s attitude towards human nudity and sexuality between the mid-1950s and the turn of the 1980s was a function of the evolving political, social, cultural and economic conditions. The manifestation of the effects of these conditions on the way of the images of **male** nudity and sexuality were shaped, shown and functionalised in the

<sup>6</sup> “Normalizační filmy” – according to the classification made by Jaromír Blažejovski (“Normalizační film”, *Cinepur*, 2002, no. 21, p. 8) distinguishing three levels in the cinema production in the CSRS in 1969–1989: “filmy normalizačního období” (films from the normalisation period), which included “normalizační filmy” (**normalisation** films which expressly or implicitly carried the ideology of normalisation), and among them i.a. “normalizující filmy” (**normalising** films, which formed the hard kernel of propaganda).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the films *My Brother Has a Cute Brother* (*Můj brácha má prima bráchu*, 1975) by Stanislav Strnad, or *Wandering of an Orienteer* (*Bloudění orientáčního běžce*, 1986) by Július Matula, interesting for us as their plots, like in *The Bronze Boys*, revolve around preparations for a Spartakiad. Apart from the occasional cases of some works, e.g. Věra Chytilová or Juraj Herz, this state of “prudishness” and asexuality lasted – in terms of male nudity – at least until *Bony a klid* by Vít Olmer (1987).

<sup>8</sup> *Extase* (1933).

<sup>9</sup> *Ohnivě léto* (1939).

<sup>10</sup> M. Duda, B. Formánková, “Český národ v posteli”, *Cinepur*, 2002, no. 22, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> J. Kroutvor, “Europa Środkowa. Anegdota i historia”, transl. J. Stachowski, in: *Hrabal, Kundera, Havel Antologia czeskiego eseju*, ed. J. Baluch, Kraków, 2001, p. 249.

Czechoslovak film are, at the beginning and at the end of the discussed period, the works I have selected: *The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys*. We find in them not only a proof of regression, but also of a fundamental qualitative change – in terms of displaying and sexualising manhood and sublimation, as well as transferring homosexual images to the screen – which occurred in normalised Czechoslovak cinema, paradoxically even in comparison with productions barely emerging from the times of Stalinism and socialist realism.

In this context, *The False Prince* appears as another work in Krška's career, although a special one due to the “quantum” and the intensity of the male “entourage”, in which one can notice an on-screen materialisation of homosexual fantasies; due to their escapist character we can treat them, following Michel Foucault,<sup>13</sup> as a kind of defence against oppressive cultural practices and social processes. *The Bronze Boys* reflect the degeneration of this type of phantasms in the conditions of normalised communist dictatorship. In addition, they reveal that homosexual imagery – appropriated, manipulated and, to some extent, harnessed for the purposes of the authorities (especially through public and mass showings, while negating its origins and contexts) – ceases to be an escape and shelter (and even less a practice of resistance), and becomes no. of repressive reality, serving the subjugating processes and systemic normalisation practices.

## Václav Krška

Václav Krška (1900–1969) is one of the most eminent, but also most intriguing and extraordinary figures of Czech culture and cinema of the last century. He spent the first forty years of his life in the mythical South-Bohemian land (*jihoceska krajina*): in his hometown of Písek (then called “The South Czech Athens”), and in the nearby village of Heřmaň, where he moved with his mother at the age of thirteen, after his father's death and his mother's second marriage.<sup>14</sup> Being from a relatively wealthy family (his father was a butcher, and his stepfather a miller), he could get an education, but also afford to visit Prague and travel abroad. From an early age, Krška devoted himself to literature and theatre. After his press debut in 1916, his publications included seven novels, two plays, collections of columns, short stories, fairy-tales.<sup>15</sup> In the year of his literary debut, he also began his adventure with the theatre. Here, his greatest and most spectacular success was establishing and running the Theatre Volunteer Group (Kroužek Divadelních Ochoťníků) “Heyduk” in Heřmaň for seventeen years (1920-1937). Here Krška usually directed stage adaptations, often with himself in the main roles. The group

<sup>13</sup> See J. Kochanowski, *Fantazmat zróznicowany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów*, Kraków, 2004, p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> J. Černý, *Intimní divadlo Václava Kršky*, České Budějovice, 1998, pp. 5–6, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

prepared a total of 137 theatrical premieres, staged in the open air and in natural interiors (sometimes – as in the case of the famous adaptation of *King Oedipus* – with the guest star roles of Prague actors), at times with 150 actors appearing on the stage and sometimes watched even by 500 spectators from the surrounding villages and towns, which today seems inconceivable.<sup>16</sup>

In 1939, Krška made his cinema debut after writing a screenplay based on his own novel, and co-directing the film *Fiery Summer*. After his artistic and commercial success, in 1940 he moved permanently to Prague, however he could not put in practice further directing projects (mainly due to the court trials for “unnatural debauchery” which dragged behind him from 1934)<sup>17</sup> until 1944, when together with Jiří Slavíček he made a slightly nostalgic adventure film for young audiences, *Boys at the River*.<sup>18</sup> From then on, he devoted himself entirely to cinema, ceasing all theatrical activities and (apart from screenplays for his own films) writing activities.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the Protectorate and in the first post-war years, Krška first shot, this time on his own, the poetic film *A River Performs Magic*, then the biographical tale about the “Czech Paganini”, the violinist and composer Josef Slavík, entitled *The Violin and the Dream*, and a dark social-psychological drama with a sensational plot, *Until you come back...*<sup>20</sup> However, after the February 1948 coup and the total takeover of power by the communists, up until the mid-1950s, Krška became a specialist in historical frescoes, until then avoided by filmmakers, which at the time responded to the demands of cultural policies and were highly rated (*Year of the Revolution 1848*), as well as biographies of the great Czech artists and inventors of the nineteenth century (*Messenger of Dawn* about Josef Božek, *Master Ales* about Mikoláš Aleš, *Youthful Years* about Alois Jirásek and *From my Life* about Bedřich Smetana<sup>21</sup>). However, between these heavyweights he managed

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 15–16; L. Nozar, “Literát, divadelník a trestanec. Životní osudy Václava Kršky”, *Dějiny a současnost*, 2007, no. 12, <http://dejinyasoucasnost.cz/archiv/2007/12/literat-divadelnik-a-trestanec/> (access: 12 January 2015). The group ceased its activities after 1937, when Krška moved out of Heřmaň back to Písek after the death of his mother.

<sup>17</sup> Trials against Krška for “smilstvo proti přírodě” went on in 1934 as well as in 1939 and 1943; L. Nozar, “Momenty života a díla Václava Kršky do roku 1945”, in: *Homosexualita w dějinách*, p. 395; T. Uher, “Obhájce přirozenosti. Václav Krška mezi ruralizmem a expresionismem”, in: M. Hain a kol., *Osudová osamělost. Obrisy filmové a literární tvorby Václava Kršky*, Praha, 2016, s. 23. Homosexual acts were punished in Czechoslovakia until 1950 as a crime against nature, from 1951 – as a crime against society, and in 1961 were decriminalised (after: E. Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak cinema. Black Peters and men of marble*, New York–Oxford, 2010, p. 183).

<sup>18</sup> *Kluci na řece*.

<sup>19</sup> Černý, *Intimní divadlo*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Respectively: *Řeka čaruje* (1945), *Housle a sen* (1946), and *Až se vrátíš* (1947).

<sup>21</sup> Respectively: *Revoluční rok 1848* (1949), *Posel úsvitu* (1950), *Mikoláš Aleš* (1951), *Mladá léta* (1952) and *Z mého života* (1955); J. Lauš, “Václav Krška a jeho filmy. Řeky, životopisy a další”, *Film a Video*, 14 October 2013, <http://www.filmavideo.cz/index.php/co-jste-mozna-nevedeli/568-krska> (access: 1 February 2015).

to produce two films in 1953–1954, *The Moon Over the River*<sup>22</sup> and *Silvery Wind*, which had nothing to do with the political and propaganda demands of rampant Stalinism, and so became “a voice from another world” for the contemporary audiences, or even the subject of generational identification; for Krška they were the medium of the most personal artistic expression and the culmination of his directing career.<sup>23</sup>

In 1956 Krška filmed two fairy-tale superproductions in Bulgaria: *A Legend of Love*<sup>24</sup> and *The False Prince*, and after returning to Prague – a screen adaptation of Bedřich Smetana’s opera *Dalibor*. The last years of the 1950s brought a complete change in terms of subject and style (to *neiluzivní realismus*<sup>25</sup>) in Krška’s work: with his contemporary films *Road back*, *Hic Sunt Leones* and *Green Corn*<sup>26</sup> he joined the current (which included Ladislav Helge, Jan Kadár and Elmar Klos, Zbyněk Brynych or Vojtěch Jasný) departing from socialist realism, reforming Czechoslovak cinema, and beginning a process which in a few years would result in the birth of the New Wave.<sup>27</sup> For the time being, however, these tendencies were criticised and pacified in Banská Bystrica; Krška’s film *Hic Sunt Leones* was in the “exclusive” group of works condemned there and was withdrawn from distribution,<sup>28</sup> and for several years Krška himself (except for the realisation of *The Day the Tree Blooms*<sup>29</sup>) found work only in dubbing foreign films. When he returned to directing (now also on television), Krška sometimes took up contemporary themes (in one of the three novellas of the film *Place in the Crowd* and in the works *Comedy*

<sup>22</sup> *Měsíc nad řekou* (1953).

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, p. 52. Both films were based on works by Frána Šrámek (1877–1952), a writer from the so-called generation of anarchist rebels, whose work shows influences of impressionism and pacifism, autobiographical elements associated with the *jihochaeska krajina*, and the recurring motifs of loss of illusions and youth clashing with the adult world. Krška was friends with Šrámek and repeatedly returned to his works, from staging theatre plays in Heřmaň, to television films he made at the end of his life (more in: J. Bébarová, “Oslava nespoutaného mládí. Krškovy filmové adaptace děl Fráni Šrámka”, in: Hain a kol., *Osudová osamělost*, pp. 183–208). The harmony and unanimity of creative visions and temperaments of Krška and Šrámek are sometimes compared with the later achievements of the tandem Jiří Menzel – Bohumil Hrabal; see e.g. *Panorama českého filmu*, sestavil L. Ptáček, Olomouc, 2000, p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> *Legenda o lásce*.

<sup>25</sup> Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Respectively: *Cesta zpátky* (1958), *Zde jsou lvi* (1958) and *Osení* (1960).

<sup>27</sup> Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> *Hic Sunt Leones* – a gloomy and visually austere history of an engineer with a political past, who fights with stupidity and bad will of his environment leading to a disaster at the mine – is regarded as one of the most authentic Czechoslovak films of its time, the first to show that in such a critical, dramatic and comprehensive way the effects of a clash between an individual and the political system, and of the interference of ideology into human life (see e.g. J. Škvorecký, *All the bright young men and women. A personal history of the Czech cinema*, Toronto–Montreal, 1975, p. 44; Z. Škapová, “Cesty k moderní filmové poezii”, in: S. Přádná, Z. Škapová, J. Cieslar, *Démanty všednosti. Český a slovenský film 60. let. Kapitoly o nové vlně*, Praha, 2002, p. 25).

<sup>29</sup> *Kde řeky mají slunce* (1961).

*Around a Door Handle* and *The Girl with Three Camels*<sup>30</sup>), but the most significant change in the tone of his films consists in turning to that of melancholy and elegy, dominated by themes related to aging and settling life affairs, as in *Last Rose from Casanova* and *The Torrents of Spring*, adapted from Ivan Turgenev, and above all in two major television films: *Leaving with Autumn* and *Ash*.<sup>31</sup>

Krška was usually characterised succinctly as (apart from being a skilled craftsman and a specialist in biographical-historical works), “the poet of the screen”, a continuator or even the creator of the “poetic” line of development in Czechoslovak cinema.<sup>32</sup> There were attempts to pigeonhole him as a lyric, a representative of ruralism and vitalism, a naive sensualist<sup>33</sup> and an idyllic, a specialist in visual epic poems and “songs of youth and love”.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Krška’s works were accused of sentimentalism, exaltation and melodramaticism, verbal and gestural pathos, literalism and banality, exaggeration, decorativism, over-aesthetisation, hybridisation and extremism of means of expression; it was claimed that his work lacks *esprit* and they are burdened with symbolism of literary provenance, with a simultaneous lack of purely filmic metaphors and image equivalent for the poetic and philosophical concepts of the author.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, Krška’s films irritated with a certain sovereignty and the fact that they appeared “at the wrong time” and were “not moving with the times”,<sup>36</sup> not only when – as in the 1950s – they violated the principles of interpreting socialist realism.<sup>37</sup> They were riddled with anxiety, exclusive, and difficult to classify – “the opposite of academic reservedness and pragmatism of Barandov”.<sup>38</sup> Jan Němec

<sup>30</sup> Respectively: *Místo v houfu* (1964), *Komedie s Klikou* (1964), and *Dívka s třemi velbloudy* (1967).

<sup>31</sup> Respectively: *Poslední růže od Casanovy* (1966), *Jarní vody* (1968), *Odcházeti s podzimem* (1965), and *Popel* (1969).

<sup>32</sup> See J. Dvořák, *Poetický svět Václava Kršky*, Praha, 1989, p. 31; O. Sabol, “Všechny krásy světa. Poetické filmy Václava Kršky”, in: Hain a kol., *Osudová osamělost*, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Škvorecký, *All the bright young men*, p. 250. On Krška’s connections with ruralism see more in: Uher, *Obhájce přirozenosti*.

<sup>34</sup> *Píseň mládí a lásky* is the subtitle of the *Fieri Summer*.

<sup>35</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 11; Škvorecký, *All the bright young men*, p. 250–251; M. Hain, “*Pocit neomezené fantazie. Housle a sen a žánr životopisného filmu*”, in: Hain a kol., *Osudová osamělost*, p. 136; Sabol, *Všechny krásy světa*, p. 75. Jan Žalman (Antonín Novák) considers Krška to be the most typical representative of the “literary” understanding of film poetics, a creator who in the film used only what literature had already discovered (*Umlčený film*, Praha, 2008, p. 157).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. A.J. Liehm, *Ostře sledované filmy. Československá zkušenost*, Praha, 2001, p. 196 (Polish translation: “Filmy pod specjalnym nadzorem. Doświadczenie czechosłowackie”, *Film na Szwecję*, 2003, no. 404); M. Cyroň, “*Osudová osamělost. Václav Krška w kontekstu československé kinematografie*”, in: Hain a kol., *Osudová osamělost*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> H. Bártová, “*Proměny novinářského diskurzu ve vztahu k vnímání poetického filmu Václava Kršky*”, bakalářská diplomová práce, Olomouc, Univerzita Palackého, 2012, p. 67. A meaningful detail, which shows the position of the former and Krška’s *modus operandi*, was that everyone addressed him as “mister”, and not “comrade”; Liehm, *Ostře sledované filmy*, p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 28. Contemporary critics also appreciate Krška’s biographical films of the 1940s and 1950s, noting that the director smuggled in them – supposedly preserving

– the leading figure and *enfant terrible* of the New Wave, Krška's student at FAMU (Filmová a televizní fakulta Akademie múzických umění v Praze) and assistant at the beginning of his career, recognises the *Moon Over the River* as the first Czechoslovak film which directly revealed the director's personality, and Krška himself as the first creator in the history of the Czech cinema who developed an individual, personal style, becoming the forerunner of modernist cinema and a predecessor of, for instance, Michelangelo Antonioni in his accurate and intense analysis of feelings.<sup>39</sup>

The creations of Krška – a poet and a lyric – betray his flair,<sup>40</sup> which showed primarily in the introspective nature of his work, when the inner world of film characters served the director as a medium of uncompromising mental and emotional self-analysis, and in constant attempts to reconcile contradictions. According to Krška's monographer, Jan Dvořák, his films in a way develop in two lines, one of which carries expressive action, characters and conflicts (often conventional), is realistic and epic, while the other pursues a metaphorisation of reality, works with imagination and "thought nonsense". His works therefore become a combination of psychologism and documentarism, or almost naturalistically perceived reality with aesthetics, stylisation and symbolism; simplicity and sincerity are accompanied in them by dark mysteries of the human soul, lyricism is combined with intense eroticism, and vitality and youthfulness – with disillusionment and disappointment with life. Elements of provincial origin and folk traditions appear beside artistic anaesthetizing, and the longing for the south Czech countryside does not contradict the desire for exotic and imaginary lands.<sup>41</sup>

We can therefore consider the conflict between reason and feeling, youth and maturity, dreaming and idealism, responsibility and pragmatism to be key for Krška's works, and the personification of all these antinomies – to be mostly young, sensitive, ambiguous, "species-specific" men,<sup>42</sup> who escape social bonds, are subjected to tests of character, and are trimmed to universally accepted dimensions. The perfect embodiment of such a figure became the junior high school student Jan Ratkin from *Silvery Wind*, whose struggle against his school and family, as

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socialist realist conventions – specific lyricism, symbolism, stylistic means etc.; Cyroň, *Osudová osamělost*, pp. 17, 21; Hain, *Pocit neomezené fantazie*, p. 135; *Panorama českého filmu*, p. 318.

<sup>39</sup> A similar attitude of Němec can be seen e.g. in the documentary series *Zlatá šedesátá* (dir. Martin Šulík, Czech Republic, 2009); see also Škvorecký, *All the bright young men*, p. 114; P. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, London, 2005, p. 167; Cyroň, *Osudová osamělost*, p. 20; Sabol, *Všechny krásy světa*, p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, 52.

<sup>42</sup> Grzegorz Piotrowski's description: "Podwójny świat. Uwagi o narracji i tożsamości w tekstach homoseksualnych Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza", in: id., *Pre-teksty. Myśli czytelnika i widza*, Toruń, 2007, p. 19. Krška himself always expressed a preference for "peculiar environments" and "peculiar people" ("to jsem měl vždycky rád, ta podivná prostředí a podivné lidi"; Liehm, *Ostře sledované filmy*, p. 197).

representatives of social conventions, became a struggle for independence and the right to love.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the perfect actor and masculine incarnation of Ratkin and similar characters became Eduard Cupák, the “eternal boy” and the legendary figure of the Prague homosexual commune.<sup>44</sup> Krška’s collaboration with Cupák, which started with *Youthful Years* and peaked with *Silvery Wind* and later *The False Prince*, became a breakthrough for both artists, and for the director meant a success in his search for the perfect actor, typological concretisation of his concept of youth, poetry and sensuality.<sup>45</sup> Krška found his actor in Cupák, but the type of man Cupák and his predecessors or successors represented, although it could be a generational model, was the opposite of the ideological expectations of the age<sup>46</sup> and general standards of the cinema of Czechoslovak people’s democracy.

Krška’s films irritated, stood out and resisted classification due to the restless and “metadimensional” styling, the combining of opposites, their emotional tone, and the construction of the character – but at the foundation of it all there could have been primarily a lack of recognition and/or a lack of acceptance of their homotextuality.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout his life (or at least his adult life – from the early thirties), Krška did not hide his homosexuality – Lukáš Nozar refers to him with the telling term *tajně slavný*.<sup>48</sup> From the beginning, motifs or even openly homoerotic themes appeared in his works – both literary (for example in the novels *Klaris a šedesát věrných* and *Dionysos s růží* or in texts published in literary homosexual magazines *Hlas* and *Nový Hlas*), as well as theatrical (for example, in his on-stage productions of *Nesmírný štít* of 1929 and 1936).<sup>49</sup> They also surfaced in his film debut,

<sup>43</sup> *Panorama českého filmu*, p. 115. Dvořák writes in this context about the similarities of the *Silvery Wind* and Elia Kazan’s *East of Eden* (1954) and the characters played in these films by Eduard Cupák and James Dean; Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Putna, *Od Kršky do Trošky*, p. 456.

<sup>45</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, pp. 20–25.

<sup>46</sup> Bártová, *Proměny novinářského diskurzu*, p. 67; S. Přádná, “Poetika postav, typů, (ne)herců”, in: Přádná, Škapová, Cieslar, *Démanty všednosti*, p. 152.

<sup>47</sup> According to Tomasz Kitliński and Paweł Leszkowicz, “due to the fact that homosexuality goes beyond the regime of the heterosexual form, it is forced to be textualised. Textualisation means putting on textual and visual masks, being forced to function as an excess in significance, duality of meaning, instability in the system of meanings, especially in relation to gender and sexuality. Homosexuality is therefore a figure of textuality”; “Homotekstualność. Homoseksualność i twórczość”, in: *Lektury inności. Antologia*, eds. M. Dąbrowski, R. Pruszczyński, Warszawa, 2007, p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> Nozar, *Momenty života*, pp. 396, 402; see also e.g. Škvorecký, *All the bright young men*, p. 39. However, according to German Ritz, while biographical information may be an incentive, they cannot be the goal of a homosexual reading, and they do not constitute a sufficient premise to determine the existence of a homosexual construction (“Literatura w labiryncie pożądania. Homoseksualność a literatura polska”, in: *Lektury inności*, p. 195).

<sup>49</sup> Nozar, *Momenty života*, p. 398; id., *Literát, divadelník a trestanec*; Černý, *Intimní divadlo*, pp. 36–38.

taking on the form so sublime and at the same time tangible and suggestive that for decades *Fiery Summer* became “the most homoerotic” Czech film.<sup>50</sup>

However, it should be noted that in Krška’s cinema there are no explicitly homosexual attitudes, nor should we look for direct verbalisation or display of homosexuality; at the heart of most films there are more or less conventional and traditional stories and heterosexual romantic couples.<sup>51</sup> Attentive viewers, however, will notice not only the brave display of masculine sex appeal and nakedness, but also characteristic scenes and symptomatic motifs which show almost directly – that is, without special sublimation or camouflage – what in modern cinema had seemed impossible to show or even more clearly suggest. For example: the main character of *Fiery Summer*, Julian (Václav Sova) admires the physicality of Petr (Josef Stadler, who walks around bare-chested for most of the film) during a naked dip in a river together, but clearly embarrassed by his feelings he confesses to a friend that he would like to be like him (heterosexual?<sup>52</sup>); in *Green Corn*, Lojza (Vít Olmer) brings his closest colleague Zdeněk (Jaroslav Satoranský) to the attic of his house after his unsuccessful suicide attempt, where he prepares a place for him to sleep and where they, soaked with rain, dry each other with towels – Zdeněk reacts to the affectionate kindness of his friend, and even more to his nakedness with confusion and adoring looks through the tears; in *Till You Return...*, Vladimír (Václav Voska), wandering around Prague after escaping from jail, exchanges meaningful looks with an older man who passes him a lighter, and then leaves after him, however the edit allows us only to guess what happened next (but also in the connection with the character of the main character – an outsider)...<sup>53</sup>

In recent years, filmmakers and journalists have only begun to pay attention to the homoerotic subtexts and connotations of certain scenes and motifs in Krška’s films.<sup>54</sup> However, they found that it is not possible to talk about their full queer

<sup>50</sup> Putna, *Od Kršky do Trošky*, p. 455.

<sup>51</sup> L. Skupa, “Všechno je krásné (mezi námi kluky). Queer aspekty filmů Václava Kršky”, *Cinepur*, 2010, no. 71, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> See J. Stuchlý, *Milujem to, co ztrácíme...*, <http://25fps.cz/2011/ohnive-letu/> (access: 8 April 2014). More about the relationship of Julio and Petr in: Sabol, *Všechny krásy světa*, p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> Čáp placed homosexual characters and themes in some of his films in a similar, not directly spoken (unnamed) but free and unhypocritical way, e.g. in the work *Fog on the Swamps (Mlhy na Blatech)* from 1943. Václav (Vladimír Salač) is unambiguously fascinated and in love with Vojta, whom his father accepted to work at the farm (Rudolf Hrušínský), while Vaclav’s mother worries that the farmhand may “spoil” (“zkazit”) her son.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Ewa Mazierska sees *Silvery Wind* as the “first socialist camp film”; she believes that Krška created a very specific type of romance, which on the one hand is filled with specific atmosphere of hysteria and more occupied with emotions of men than women, focusing on intense male friendships (which could reflect emotions and repressed homosexual desires) and on the other hand – “decadent” styling and excess; the author considers these elements as fundamental for queer aesthetics; ead., *Masculinities in Polish*, pp. 188, 198.

undertone, because they did not go beyond the conventions of their time, and were realised in a typical contradiction: on the one hand, they reversed the traditional sexual hierarchies, spectacularised the male body, etc., but on the other they suppressed a clearer correlation between eroticism and the way of paying attention to masculinity because of the threat of implicating homosexuality.<sup>55</sup> It may therefore be possible to refer the interpretations of Krška's literary works to his films:<sup>56</sup> the foundation of homotextuality in his cinema would then be the "mask" and "signal" – the director masked the homosexual theme and/or a homosexual reading, but at the same time did not want to cover them completely, introducing secret signs and signals to his works.

Having said that, we should be aware that Krška's cinema is simply pre-emanipatory and pre-discursive. His works will then defend themselves as "obvious" and "explicit" homosexual constructs<sup>57</sup> – fulfilled as far as it is possible in *mainstream* art, in addition realised in totalitarian systems. Krška's presentation of homosexuality was never "absolute" – whether patronising or subversive – always refined, stylised, accommodated and encapsulated with double meanings, but ever present and smuggled into films in every possible way.<sup>58</sup> In addition, we can extend another significant description from Nozar, relating to the film *A River Performs Magic*,<sup>59</sup> to all of Krška's works and say that they were *únikové* – but not in the sense (implied in Polish language) that they escaped or avoided certain topics, but (in its strict dictionary definition<sup>60</sup>) that they were films that diverged from reality and made it possible to escape from it. We could then look at Krška's work as a realisation – at that time and in that place – of the Foucaultian "art of life",<sup>61</sup> which in the Czech director's interpretation would on the one hand be the practice of resistance to the heteronormative and totalitarian world, realised through a sophisticated game with the norms, and on the other the creation of a phantasm as an area of personal and artistic freedom. On the one hand, Krška **works** with what is connected with "reality",<sup>62</sup> with the "inside" and the "here" – trying to compromise with a certain order, transcend norms, use conventions for his own purposes and apply his homosexual sensitivity to "this world"; on the other hand, he actually **lives** "somewhere else", "outside" and "there" – in another world, where imagination, fantasy and dreams allow for more direct and open expressions of homosexual desires.<sup>63</sup> In this context, Krška's film work should be

<sup>55</sup> Skupa, *Všechno je krásné*, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Nozar, *Literát, divadelník a trestanec*.

<sup>57</sup> As a type of expression specified by Ritz: *Literatura w labiryntcie pożądania*, p. 195.

<sup>58</sup> Nozar, *Momenty života*, p. 429.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>60</sup> J. Siatkowski, M. Basaj, *Słownik czesko-polski*, Warszawa, 2002, p. 840.

<sup>61</sup> From: Kochanowski, *Fantazmat*, pp. 219, 222.

<sup>62</sup> Following the oppositions collated by Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej*, p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> Kochanowski, *Fantazmat*, pp. 218–219, 221.

seen, apart from all else, as a phantasmatic autobiography – an artistically ordered product of releasing his homosexual phantasms, also aimed at a their self-realisation or liberation in the audience.<sup>64</sup>

### *The False Prince*

The phantasmatic and *únikový* character of Krška's works emerged in a special way in two films made in the convention of a fairy-tale (moreover, an exotic fairy-tale) which is inherently irrational, escapist and compensatory. This refers to the lavish productions from 1956, filmed in cooperation with Bulgaria and in the surrounding open-air locations: *A Legend of Love* and *The False Prince*, which were the first post-World War II co-productions in Czechoslovak cinema.<sup>65</sup> *The False Prince* was created, somewhat paradoxically, as an "additional" or "complementary" film, made "on the occasion" of filming *A Legend of Love* – when the parties to the co-production contract decided to use the team, the existing scenography and costumes to produce a title which had not been originally planned.<sup>66</sup>

After the premiere both works were badly received by the Czechoslovak critics, who saw their excessive visual appeal and the expressive, personal style of the director („krškism” – *krškism*)<sup>67</sup> as a shortcoming; there had been voices to dispose of the latter at least since the premiere of the *The Moon Over the River*.<sup>68</sup> *A Legend of Love* was attacked in particular, as, according to the central daily of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia *Rudé Právo*, the ostentatiousness and arrogance of artistic means („pompous, inflated directorism”) overwhelmed the ideological meaning and simplicity of the literary prototype,<sup>69</sup> that is the play by the “romantic communist”, the Turkish writer Nazim Hikmet. Nevertheless, the films were a big success with the Czechoslovak cinema audiences: until the end of 1995 *The False Prince* was seen by 2,102,800 viewers, and *A Legend of Love* by 1,969,388; *The False Prince* thus became one of the most watched films in Krška's oeuvre.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej*, p. 172; ead., “Próba teorii fascynacji filmem”, in: ead., *Prace wybrane*, vol. 3, p. 337.

<sup>65</sup> In terms of feature films, since documentaries – co-produced with the Soviet Union – had already been created; P. Skopal, *Filmová kultura severního trojúhelníku. Filmy, kina a diváci českých zemí, NDR a Polska 1945–1970*, Brno, 2014, pp. 29–30.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> More in: Cyroň, *Osudová osamělost*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Liehm, *Ostře sledované filmy*, p. 197 (Polish translation: p. 105).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; P. Skopal, “Svoboda pod dohledem. Zahájení koprodukčního modelu výroby v kinematografiích socialistických zemí na příkladu Barrandova (1954 až 1960)”, in: *Naplánovaná kinematografie*, p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> Krška's most popular films were respectively seen by: *A River Performs Magic* – 4,807,856; *From My Life* – 2,600,479; *Silvery Wind* – 2,261,854; *The Moon Over the River* – 2,039,642; *Youthful Years* – 1,931,429 viewers; V. Březina, *Lexikon českého filmu. 2000 filmů 1930–1996*, Praha, 1996, *passim*.

After some years, both fairy-tales have been rehabilitated, and today are usually counted, next to Krška's *Silvery Wind* and *The Moon Over the River*, among the leading achievements of Czech cinema of the 1950s.<sup>71</sup> Antonín and Mira Liehms saw in them – perhaps to a lesser extent in the context of the Czechoslovak productions of the time, but much more in relation to Bulgarian cinema – the first signs of departing from the Zhdanov Doctrine in post-Stalinist cultural policy. Krška introduced elements of beauty and poetry of the cinema of people's democracy, and his intent was rather to engage and entertain the audience than educate.<sup>72</sup> According to the Liehms, the appearance in 1956–1957 of Krška's successive works, namely *Silvery Wind* (which had a belated premiere in November 1956), *The False Prince* (in April 1957), and *A Legend of Love* (in August 1957) was a signal that the Czech cinema was entering a new phase and that new perspectives opened before them.<sup>73</sup>

*The False Prince* was based on a romantic fairy-tale by the German writer Wilhelm Hauff (1802–1827), *Das Märchen vom falschen Prinzen*,<sup>74</sup> very popular until today and often adapted to the screen. The decision to make oriental tales the subject of the prestigious, Czechoslovak-Bulgarian co-production project could have been motivated by the enormous success (13 million viewers!<sup>75</sup>) which had just been achieved in the GDR by another adaptation of another story by Hauff about the adventures of little Muck, *The Story of Little Mook*,<sup>76</sup> directed by Wolfgang Staudte. It turned out that the film tale – when combining adventure action with exotic environment, adding to it comedy elements and using the full capabilities of the colour film tape – becomes attractive not only for children, but also for a broad adult audience,<sup>77</sup> thirsty of grand, entertaining spectacles after a period of social realist restraint. Krška himself took on the *False Prince* to spin his own story – using Hauff's oriental tale as a personal vehicle for his original expression and the canvas for his individual fantasies.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. *Panorama českého filmu*, p. 318.

<sup>72</sup> M. Liehm, A.J. Liehm, *The most important art. Eastern European film after 1945*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1977, p. 138. At the same time, the Liehms notice a “static composition” and “vulgar colours” in Krška's fairy-tales, and state that they had not emerged clearly above the mediocrity of the Czechoslovak film production at the time.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>74</sup> Czechoslovak cinema adapted *Das Märchen vom falschen Prinzen* to screen once more, in the 1984 co-production with West Germany *The False Prince (Falešný princ)*, directed by Dušan Rapoš; however, particularly when compared with Krška's work, the film proves sluggish, completely devoid of sophistication and sex appeal, with bland actors in the roles of Labakan and Prince Omar (Yugoslavs Svetislav Gončić and Dušan Vojnović).

<sup>75</sup> Q. Shen, *The politics of magic. DEFA fairy-tale films*, Chicago, 2015, pp. 3–4.

<sup>76</sup> *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (1953).

<sup>77</sup> Skopal, *Filmová kultura*, p. 203. On the other hand, the didacticism of the fairy-tales, emphasis on the “righteous” and “progressive” elements in them, and heroes from the common folk were very much in line with the cultural policy of the communist authorities. On relations of GDR fairy-tales with socialist realism see: Shen, *The politics of magic*, p. 12ff.

The hero of *The False Prince* is a lazy, daydreaming tailor's apprentice Labakan (Cupák), who despises ordinary existence and simple people, and longs for a grand life, wealth and opulence. One day, Labakan tries on the fabulous outfit made to the emir's order, admires himself in the mirror, and when he realises with pleasure that people in the street bow to him as if to a master, he decides to seize the opportunity to steal the robes and leave the city. On the way, he meets a young man, who turns out to be prince Omar (Karel Fiala) – raised abroad due to a prophecy that he would be doomed if he had grown up at the court of his parents, and now returning to his home incognito. His hallmark was to be an ancestral Sultan dagger. At night, Labakan steals the dagger from Omar and goes to the place of the meeting with the Sultan, who recognises him and adopts him as a son. Meanwhile, the rightful prince is, on his arrival to the court, considered a usurper – a deranged tailor's apprentice – and thrown into prison. However, his mother does not believe that Labakan is indeed her son and tricks Sultan into putting the young men through a test: to sew the coronation robes, which of course would be a success only for Labakan, and not Omar, who was trained to fight and rule. However, this evidence seems ambiguous to the Sultan, so he puts the young men through another test: this time, they have to choose between two magic caskets. Labakan indicates the casket with the words “luck and wealth”, while Omar – the one with the words “honour and courage”. The first contains a needle and scissors, and the other – a crown, and so it ultimately proves who is the true son of the Sultan. The people laugh and tease Labakan, who fears prison and the executioner. Fortunately, at this point, the young tailor... wakes up from his dream, cured of meaningless desires and longing for lordly life. Along with the florist Fatma (Jana Rybářová), who is in love him, and with his underage friend Ali (Aleš Košnar), Labakan comes out to the city streets to greet prince Omar, returning from abroad.

*The False Prince* can be subject to “double-reading”, and interpreted at different levels. We can see its subversive nature already at the plot level (anticipating the recognitions of contemporary gender studies), which lies in challenging the stability, clarity and obviousness of individual identity. Labakan can become Omar, Omar can become Labakan – they just need to change their disguise. We could even go further and treat the fluidity and performativity of Labakan's identity as a paraphrase of the fluidity of his sexual identity and the performative nature of his sexuality – especially when we note the sensitive friendship between the hero and Ali, his obvious *Hassliebe* with Fatma, and the clear chemistry between him and Omar (perhaps reflecting the attraction between Cupák and Fiala).

*The False Prince* challenges the old folk wisdom that “clothes don't make the man”. In Krška's fairy-tale, they most definitely do – not just in terms of human and social relationships, in which, after all (according to another proverbial saying) “fine feathers make fine birds”. By changing his clothes, Labakan wants to seem a lord, someone others reckon with, but it is not all – the ritual of dressing

up has a deeper, inner dimension for him, that of initiation and transgression: his change of identity becomes primarily a means to realise the desire to be the master of his own fate. Labakan strives to go beyond his modest and colourless existence, grabs the opportunity to open new avenues, and wants to go beyond the constraints imposed by his social situation.<sup>78</sup> In this way, the story told by Krška on the one hand meets the requirements of the binding ideology, demonstrating the superiority of a small, simple man over an empty magnate, however, on the other hand, it escapes the narrow interpretations of the class and gives the plebeian unexpected depth, inner class and spiritual superiority, when it turns out that Labakan can surpass the blood prince with his own “princeness”.<sup>79</sup>

The “oriental fantasy comedy” turns out to hold, like some *Bildungsroman*, the most serious, ultimate story about looking for one’s place in life and fighting for the individually perceived “luck and fortune”. The film takes it all into the parentheses of a dream vision or a daydream fantasy, and in this way satisfies the genre conventions, however it does not stop at assessing Labakan’s aspirations as fickle dreams, or using it as a moralising coming-of-age story of accepting reality. The consequences of Labakan’s dream of doing something with his life appear to be quite real and “tough”. The underlying serious and elevated tone of *The False Prince* suggests that the game the main character plays is all or nothing, that – as in a dramatic novel of initiation – it is about his existential “to be or not to be”. The final awakening means therefore not so much that dreams are illusory, but that it is impossible to cross one’s own existence. Paradoxically, Labakan turns out to be a tragic individual, trapped between who he is and who he would like and could be.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, the phantasmatic nature of *The False Prince* shows two faces, two complementing aspects. On the one hand, the dream about being the Sultan’s son is for Labakan a way to add colour to his life and escape the mundane facts of his daily existence (as directing the film was for Krška in the gloomy 1950s). The tailor, thanks to his dreams, and the director, thanks to his cinematic imagination, can transport themselves to a better, greater world where they are not restricted

<sup>78</sup> The meaningful scenes of changing robes, the rituals of changing (and undressing), the theme of dreams about better clothes – and all related paralipses perform similar functions also in other Krška’s films. For example, in *A River Performs Magic* the protagonist – councillor Leopold Kohák, ageing in an unhappy marriage, finding no satisfaction in work – miraculously becomes young and begins a new life after a naked swim in the Sázava and changing into the rags of a vagrant met at the river; Freddy from *Road Back*, while strolling through Prague before a planned robbery, stops for longer before a shop window and admires luxury suits and ties, dreaming of a better, unattainable life, etc.

<sup>79</sup> J. Černý, *Eduard Cupák*, Praha, 1998, p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> Krška was not quite alone in the Czechoslovak cinema in his use of “light” starting material in order to make serious stories. For example, Evald Schorm, adapting in 1967 Iva Hercíková’s book *Five Girls Around the Neck (Pět holek na krku)*, transformed the “girly novel” into a bitter moral drama about the tragic game of life; see Žalman, *Umlčený film*, p. 62.

by any barriers and can freely realise their escapist desires and experience a more interesting, intensified life. On the other hand, we can look at the phantasm in Labakan's dream as at a film about him, a "practice of resistance" against the disappointing and unaccepted reality,<sup>81</sup> and even more – as at the form of an active struggle against "this world" by coming up with "other worlds" and designing a different self in them. Another way of one's own existence. Jacek Kochanowski considers this kind of strategies significant for homosexual desires impossible to fulfil and externalise in the real world.<sup>82</sup>

In the adaptation and organisation of the plot material from Hauff's tale, Krška efficiently and creatively used all those measures which German Ritz defined years later (in relation to literary texts) as characteristic for the poetics of unuttered homosexual desire.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, identity in *The False Prince* is treated in various ways – mainly, its unambiguity is broken down and diffused, manifested in the multiplication (doubling) of the characters, creating their doubles (through a role swap), and simulating experiences; we also have – in Labakan's dream vision – the multiplication of worlds discussed by Ritz (from real into oneiric), fake events, "substitute" action, and an event which ultimately turns out to be a non-event. These qualities allow us to look at Krška's work as a fulfilled homosexual phantasm realised in the poetics of unuttered desire.

The form of *The False Prince* as well as that of its sister film *A Legend of Love* is qualified as "excessively" expressive and visually attractive (which, as we have seen, was pointed out by contemporary critics), in other words, redolent of the condemned aestheticism. Krška creates (together with e.g. his regular collaborator, the operator Ferdinand Pečenka) an unreal, fairy-tale world, somewhat oriental and full of glamour and beauty. Crowds of extras were used in the collective scenes. The outfits at the Sultan's court are sophisticated and opulent, but also common people are dressed with adequate elegance and colour. The Palace rooms and gardens are sumptuous, luxurious and grandly designed, and even the scenography of the tailor's shop or the inn interiors do not lack panache and lavish style. In turn, the impressive natural landscapes of the sunny coast and mountains, as well as picturesque streets and old city walls were provided by Nesebar, the Bulgarian rocky peninsula on the Black Sea, declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. All of it together is extremely well presented by the colour film tape Agfacolor – *The False Prince* is spectacular, monumental and lofty. Its style seems "too noticeable" and over-the-top: full of excess and surplus, often spectacular, overstyled and extravagant; it is characterised by a certain artificial, theatrical quality, and perhaps even aristocratic gesture, pomp and mannerism. This catalogue of characteristics

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Kochanowski, *Fantazmat*, pp. 218–219, 221; S. Jagielski, *Maskarady męskości. Pragnienie homospołeczne w polskim kinie fabularnym*, Kraków, 2013, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> Kochanowski, *Fantazmat*, pp. 218–219.

<sup>83</sup> Ritz, *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 197.

could provide an excellent opportunity to ascribe a “camp look” to Krška – if it was not for the fact that, in contrast to camp,<sup>84</sup> the para-camp style of *The False Prince* is devoid of the sense of irony and humour (as I suggested earlier, it is rather discreetly grand) and more importantly, it does not obscure or dominate the content. This is why it seems more accurate to connect Krška’s fairy-tale with the aesthetics of *glamour* and splendour, whose codes are currently associated with queer stylistics.<sup>85</sup> Either way, both the formal and stylistic features of camp described here and, related to *glamour*, sophistication, luxurious beauty, loftiness, visual excess and sensuality of *The False Prince* can be treated as determinants of aesthetics which emanates Krška’s homosexual sensitivity. The entire oriental world of *The False Prince* which he invents, and which in relation to actual reality seems completely “unrealistic” and “fake”, shows (according to Maria Janion) “its value in a different order: the disclosure of phantasmatic life” of the director.<sup>86</sup>

But the rudimentary, literally treated, derived from Hauff’s fairy-tales conventional and didactic sense of *The False Prince* remains valid to a limited extent, not only because – as I have presented it so far – Krška develops on its basis (beside, or even against Hauff’s story) an existential and transgressive story of crossing one’s own social condition and seeking happiness through an identity change; not just because it gives it a form full of queer sophistication and excess (while maintaining the fairy-tale genre conventions and simulating a light comedy genre). It keeps a limited validity mainly because of what Ritz described as a “flesh complex”,<sup>87</sup> characteristic for Krška’s work – the real subject and meaning of the film is the (omni)presence of the male body and its defined, specific representation. An oriental fairy-tale becomes a vehicle for a review of bare male bodies,<sup>88</sup> and the plot serves as a pretext for arranging situations in which they become objects of increased presence and observation. As noted by Grzegorz Piotrowski, fantasy and “oriental” (as any other vivid, e.g. mythological, symbolic or expressionist) styling can be seen as a way to mitigate or even relativise homosexual undertones,<sup>89</sup> however the excess of half-naked men in the frame, an excess not motivated by narrative needs, allows for “an explosion of non-normative meanings”<sup>90</sup> and runs deeper, triggering a deeper, double reading of *The False Prince* and *A Legend of*

<sup>84</sup> Cf. S. Sontag, “Notatki o kampie”, *Literatura na Świecie*, 1979, no. 9, pp. 319–320.

<sup>85</sup> Jagielski, *Maskarady męskości*, p. 86.

<sup>86</sup> Janion, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej*, p. 172.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Ritz, *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 196.

<sup>88</sup> According to the distinctions of Kenneth Clark, and John Berger after him, these bodies are not just *naked*, but *nude*. It is the way of looking at and filming *naked people* (“to be naked is simply to be without clothes”) which makes them *nude* (“to be nude is to be seen naked by others” – “it is an art form”); K. Clark, *Akt. Studium idealnej formy*, Warszawa, 1998, p. 9; J. Berger, *Ways of seeing*, London, 1972 (quoted after: P. Lehman, *Running scared. Masculinity and the representation of the male body*, Detroit, 2007, p. 21).

<sup>89</sup> Piotrowski, *Podwójny świat*, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Sebastian Jagielski’s definition: *Maskarady męskości*, p. 47.

*Love* on yet another level. According to Ritz, the “flesh complex” revealed in Krška’s fairy-tales, when “the absolute flesh quality” is born, characterised mainly by beauty, aestheticisation and “disinterest”, it is mainly the hallmark of a homosexual image of the body, and its description is ruled by homosexual look and the logic of desire.<sup>91</sup>

Thus understood “flesh complex” is found, after all, in many other works of Krška. In the fairy-tales it appears and plays out in an overstyled and exotic Orient, however the most common phantasmatic scenery for a parade of male bodies was the South-Bohemian land during the summertime, with the river and abundant nature. This kind of landscape and natural environment were typical of many Czechoslovak films (for instance the pre-war *River* by Josef Rovenský and the abovementioned *Ecstasy*, or later – *Romance for Trumpet* by Otakar Vávra) as the background of lyrical confessions, amorous rapture and erotic breathlessness.<sup>92</sup> The leitmotiv of a river is key for Krška’s work, both the actual thing and its associations: according to Dvořák, the river here is a pure and untamed element, ever flowing, destroying and purifying; it is also the presentiment of distance and eternity – it is like life.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, the river in Krška’s work becomes associated with the themes of bathing, nudity, eroticism, and above all youth.<sup>94</sup> They are so important to a few of his works that their subject matter could be summed up simply as “the young (men) at the river”.

This kind of sublimation of Krška’s homoeroticism<sup>95</sup> was most completely realised in films such as *Fiery Summer*, *The Boys at the River*, *A River Performs Magic*, *Silvery Wind* and *Road Back*. The action or even individual sequences of these films, taking place at the riverside, often in full summer sun, give an opportunity for a multitude of glances at naked men and for eroticising and glorifying their

<sup>91</sup> Ritz, *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 196–197. Rangel Vulchanov’s film *Aesop*, made thirteen years after *Labakan*, similarly a Czechoslovak-Bulgarian co-production, proves that it does not necessarily have to be so as it fulfils similar “initial conditions”. While in Krška’s work we have an exotic, southern setting (the island of Samos), distinct styling (historically styled as antiquity), a certain freedom of customs and a lot of pretexts of the plot and staging to undress (mainly) men, it is accompanied by complete lack of eroticism in the way the male body is represented. In addition, it seems symptomatic (comparing the dates both films were made: 1956 and 1969) that the way of discovering and influencing today’s reality is completely different: escapist and at the same time diversionary in Krška, and operating with allusions, symbols, ellipses and “Aesopian language” in Vulchanov.

<sup>92</sup> Skupa, *Všechno je krásné*, p. 20. Original title respectively: *Řeka* (1933) and *Romance pro křídlovku* (1966).

<sup>93</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 13; see also Cyroň, *Osudová osamělost*, p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> Lukáš Nozar links the described themes, especially in Krška’s early literary and film works, with the social movements which were emerging from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and “discovering the human body” under the slogan “youth, nudity and sunlight” (*Momenty života*, p. 419). Tomáš Uher writes directly that the entrance to the river appears in Krška’s work as an almost sexual act (*Obhájce přirozenosti*, p. 32).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Putna, *Od Kršky do Trošky*, p. 455.

bodies. Krška stages various scenes associated with rest and work – swimming, trips out of the city, lounging, having games, sports and fitness, fishing, sailing, etc. – so that we can watch as more or less nude men walk, run, swim and dive into the water, how they play and ride on horseback. Krška arranges a “natural” spectacle of male existence against the background of landscapes rather than indoor portraits.<sup>96</sup> The most symptomatic and revelatory for this described tangle of themes seem to be the scenes of male bathing, especially skinny dipping, in most of the abovementioned works, although in a particular way in *Silvery Wind*. There is a relatively extended scene in the film (though lasting only a minute and a half) of ten completely naked junior high school students happily splashing in the river, having gone outdoors after school to get into mischief and play in the water, until the idyllic situation is interrupted by a sudden warning call: “there are women here!”<sup>97</sup> Naked bath of a male duo features in the *Fiery Summer*, and a solo bath (albeit twice) in *A River Performs Magic*. In *Boys at the River*, a film considered by Dvořák a “glorification of the river of the youth”,<sup>98</sup> we see how, in line with the title, half-naked teenage characters in the water or at the water for most of the film.

In other works of Krška, the flesh complex, if it manifests itself, appears in other sceneries and not as spectacularly, and the pretexts to show attractive and exposed male bodies may be varied. Male nudes, although they mostly remain “clad and covered” in these works,<sup>99</sup> at the same time become “exposed and imaginary”.<sup>100</sup> For example, in the film *Till You Return...* there is a short side scene, in

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<sup>96</sup> In this way, Krška joins a much older, archetypal tradition, whose aesthetic form has been defined by modernist painters and photographers in particular – to mention the canonical works of Henry Scott Tuke, Ludwig von Hofmann or Thomas Eakins – in idyllic scenes of boys and young men bathing and relaxing in the nature. Naked bodies are here no. of a larger, “primal” and completely natural configuration (although not without subversive character): that of man and nature, and of men between them. The theme of a young man emerging from water combines erotic and aesthetic elements, becoming a specific “picture of desire”, but in Krška’s work it does not take on the features of epiphany and revelation, and at the same time alienation which Ritz saw, *à propos* similar themes in the work of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, as characteristic for the homosexual image of the body (*Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, pp. 56–57). I would like to thank Grzegorz Piotrowski for drawing attention to the tradition described here and to its contexts.

<sup>97</sup> As I have mentioned earlier, this scene was the reason why the film was halted in 1954 by the communist authorities. Krška unsuccessfully tried to learn the reasons why the film was not allowed to screen. When at a social occasion the director asked the then Minister of Culture Ladislav Štoll about it, the minister’s wife replied for him: “Me and other [female] comrades saw it, and we said yuck, yuck, yuck!” – quoted after: P. Taussig, *Filmový lyrik Václav Krška*, “Film a video”, <http://www.filmavideo.cz/index.php/osobnosti/236-vaclav-krska> (access: 1 February 2015).

<sup>98</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> According to Ritz’s opposition: *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 197.

<sup>100</sup> The only full male nudity (both frontal and back) in Krška’s films is presented by the teenage, maturing Jaroslav Liška in the role of Střevlík in the *Fiery Summer*.

which a group of boys dressed only in scanty briefs and shorts play volleyball at the riverside (with the sequence beginning with a sudden, unusual close up of the buttocks of one of the running players). In *The Violin and the Dream*, the pretext to arrange a show of male bodies is the phantasmagoric three-and-a-half-minute sequence of “theatre in a film”, that is staging a 19th century *ballet italien*, in which swarthy, muscular fauns in leather loincloths run after shepherdesses across fields and woods.<sup>101</sup> There is a similar ballet etude in *The False Prince*, when three scantily clad young men perform fiery Diaghilev dance figures at the court of the Sultan (among them the best-known Czech dancer and choreographer, Miroslav Kůra). In *Green Corn*, we can admire the chests of the main characters, Lojza and Zdenek, bared and beaded with sweat under their open shirts during harvest work, and their sunned, “aesthetically marked”<sup>102</sup> and eroticised faces, with slightly dazed gazes into the distance. In *A Legend of Love*, the poor painter Ferchad (Apostol Karamitev) presents his picturesque torso and seductive thighs, wet with sea water and windswept during the escape with Princess Širín, or marked by suffering and later during torture after his capture by the vizier’s army. Even into the “decent” biographical *Master Ales*, filmed in the epicentre of socialist realism, Krška managed to sneak in a scene of full-back nudity in a sculptor’s studio with the model Drábek, the more “progressive” for the fact that it was presented by the then sixty-three year old actor Jaroslav Vojta.

The key themes of nature, river, youth and nudity are also associated in Krška’s work with the cult of beauty and friendship, referring to the tradition of *músa paidiké*<sup>103</sup> (not without melancholic overtones of “et in Arcadia ego” on a deeper level).<sup>104</sup> And in the context of friendship or camaraderie, numerous films appear to encourage “another” reading of scenes of close, often intense bodily interaction between men: on the one hand, ritualised fights, duels or wrestling, on the other – intimate *tête-à-tête*, full of conversations and confessions, dreamy looks and affectionate, more or less fleeting touches and gestures.<sup>105</sup> For example, *Fiery Summer* exposes physical contacts between Julio and Petr, his childhood friend (their nudges and pats, runs and competitions, the shared bath mentioned earlier), and between Petr and the teenage Střevlík. In the *Green Corn*, the friendship between Lojza and Zdenek is marked with an entire range of various mutual

<sup>101</sup> The goat-legged figures of fauns and satyrs were one of Krška’s favourite themes in his literary works (Uher, *Obhájce přirozenosti*, p. 42).

<sup>102</sup> Skupa, *Všechno je krásné*, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> Nozar, *Literát, divadelník a trestanec*.

<sup>104</sup> In some films, the glorification of friendship takes on an additional hue – that of ephēbophilia; the theme of a close friendship between a (young) man and a boy is particularly important in the *Fiery Summer* and *The False Prince* (the theme of a maturing boy confronted with a mature, gay man was also a key one in Krška’s literary works; Nozar, *Momenty života*, p. 414).

<sup>105</sup> See Skupa, *Všechno je krásné*, p. 20 (the author refers to the subtexts highlighted by Vito Russo in his book *The celluloid closet. Homosexuality in the movies*).

touches and tender gestures. In *Silvery Wind*, Ratkin has close, also physically close, relations with many men: an older student Zach (Otto Lackovič), his uncle Jiří (Radovan Lukavský), a fellow junior high school student Hugo (Oldřich Slavík), to whom he recites poems, and especially with Majer (Jaroslav Wagner), with whom he embraces, boxes, tussles, and rolls around on the ground before jumping into the river. Fights and physical locking is also present in *Road Back*: after an attempted armed robbery, Dan (Josef Vinklář) chases Freddy (Cupák), topples him to the ground and struggles with him, embracing him from behind until they look each other deeply in the eye and recognise each other; in the same film we also find such ritual, meaningful gestures as lighting up a cigarette and passing it to a friend's mouth (by Dan to Freddy).

The unusual styling and conscious eroticisation of the male body in Krška's films is also connected with giving male characters the function of objects of female as well as male looks. Lukáš Skupa noticed that in his creations men take on attributes in classic cinema assigned to female characters, which means they become images and objects of erotic desires, transforming (using Laura Mulvey's terminology) into to-be-looked-at-ness.<sup>106</sup> A particularly notable example of this phenomenon can be *The Moon Over the River*, in which the twenty-one-year-old Cupák – in the history of nascent erotic attraction and feeling partnered with thirty-three-year-old Dana Medřická – functions as a mascot, a fetish, an object of desire. In the already mentioned scene of Petr and Julio's naked bath in *Fiery Summer*, the voyeur is, non-traditionally, a woman – Rosa, played by the film star Lída Baarová. In *The Girl with Three Camels* the object of intense gazes is the undressing Milouš (Vladimír Pospíšil), and in *A Legend of Love* there is an entire show of fascinated looks from two sisters-princesses: Širín (Jana Rybářová) and Mechemene Banu (Vlasta Fialová), when they first see the painter Ferchad. We find a comic version of the voyeuristic motifs in *Master Ales*, where in the sculptor's studio scene mentioned earlier the peepers of male nudity are the roughly satirically outlined three German ladies “with pretences” – scandalised, but unable to take their eyes off the naked model. Making the male body a performance was supported by Krška's choice of actors for the main roles, who can be classified as male idols of their time,<sup>107</sup> (socialist) male pin-ups: Svatopluk Beneš, František Hanus, Václav Voska, Vladimír Ráž, Eduard Cupák or Vít Olmer. Extremely spectacular fetishisation and eroticisation of an idol occurs in *Road Back*, in which Cupák, on screen for virtually the entire film, is the subject of both female looks (from the infatuated Tonka) as well as male (from his friend Dan). Cupák's photogenic body is here staged and contemplated by the “smitten” camera in a spectacular way: in his hiding spot on the ship the actor lies stretched on the deck, in sensual light, wearing only skimpy shorts, like Adonis, or better – like Jane Russell in the hay

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

in *The Outlaw*.<sup>108</sup> He walks around the ship wearing either swimming trunks, or long but very fitted trousers and equally tight, sleeveless T-shirt...

In *The False Prince* – compared to all other Krška's works – it seems telling that the camera watches the body of the main hero, or the bodies of other leading characters, to a smaller extent, and operates mainly with bodies *en masse*. Also in *A Legend of Love* there is an excess of naked male matter in full sunlight, except that the main character, Ferchad, constantly walks around half-naked, presenting his tanned and hairy chest as well as muscular arms and thighs both while working on art, and during tiresome work or in prison. On the other hand, Labakan – whether dressed as a prince in luxurious robes, or as a young tailor presenting his boyish silhouette in tight white trousers and low-cut vest over a bare torso – remains dressed practically throughout the whole film. Even if we were to accept Dvořák's opinion that Cupák feels self-conscious in oriental costume,<sup>109</sup> he never once rids of it. Prince Omar is also fully dressed. However, surrounding the leading characters are mainly half-naked men, and the film disinterestedly presents their attractive bodies in the background. However, it should be said that they are primarily boys and men in their best years, "common" people, members of the "city", "village" or "port" environment; old men, as well as those who hold power and higher positions, especially at the "court", are, like all women, completely dressed. The naked bodies of the men in *The False Prince* (and in *A Legend of Love*) become an intensely present element of scenography and an unusual spectacle, only partly justified by the climate. Beautiful, swarthy, slender and agile men represent decorative bodies-objects, ubiquitous components of scenography. The servants and guards in the palace, fishermen and craftsmen, apprentices in the tailor shop, the Sultan's entourage and soldiers in his suite, dancers performing at the court, and so on – all are only partly dressed in the oriental sun, often wearing only short, tailored pants or skimpy bands on their hips, and turbans on their heads. And the more covered up among them are wearing provokingly tight trousers and permissively unbuttoned shirts or scanty vests.

Most boys and young men in Krška's fairy-tales represent a similar model of beauty: "eastern" or "Byzantine". Slender, muscular, harmoniously built, dark-skinned, dark-haired and with white teeth, rather plebeian in their facial features and simple appearance – similar to those found later in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decameron* and *Arabian Nights*.<sup>110</sup> Their beauty is from an oriental imaginary, and refers a little to the classic iconography and "Greek" ideals of Johann Winckelmann. When Krška stylises them, as he does with the singer performing the song *Růže a jasmín* in the fishing port, they resemble characters from Caravaggio's paintings – *The Lute Player* from the Hermitage, or *Bacchus* from the Borghese

<sup>108</sup> Dir. Howard Hawks (1943).

<sup>109</sup> Dvořák, *Poetický svět*, p. 34.

<sup>110</sup> *Il Decameron* (1971) and *Il fiore delle mille e una note* (1974).

Gallery. The way in which Krška presents physicality and arranges the male element in a kind of voluptuous *tableaux vivants* brings to mind also photos of Wilhelm von Gloeden, who at the turn of the 20th century photographed boys and young men in Sicily. Acts and stagings of masculine physicality in *The False Prince* and *A Legend of Love* are characterised, similar to von Gloeden,<sup>111</sup> by wonderful kitsch, “bad taste” and refined “artisticity”. On the other hand, there is also some purity (as absence of pornography), *naïveté*, lack of hypocrisy (despite sublimation and camouflaging strategies), charm and poetry of romanticism (in a nostalgic sense), or even a kind of “aristocratic quality”, a hieratic character and fullness.<sup>112</sup>

In general, the homosexual “flesh complex” materialises most intensely and peaks in these two films, in comparison with other Krška’s works. The multitude of undressed male bodies appears in *The False Prince* and *A Legend of Love* as such and in itself, and not because of its functions or the narrative need and the “epic course of things”.<sup>113</sup> In this way, the oriental fairy-tale takes on Krška’s unique, pan-erotic climate of all-encompassing masculinity, and transports us to a phantasmatic paradise filled with the intense presence of “exotic” young men. Krška takes us on a journey into the world of beautiful, transparent and accessible reality, which perhaps we have been dreaming about...

## Stanislav Strnad and the normalising film “formats”

...and which a quarter of a century later, during the period of filming *The Bronze Boys* was, for political and ideological reasons, completely impossible to imagine anymore. Under Husák, as one of the characters says in the famed regime television series *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*,<sup>114</sup> “the time of romanticism is over”.<sup>115</sup> The progressive liberalisation of the Czechoslovak communist regime since the beginning of the 1960s, crowned with the events of the Prague Spring, was thwarted in August 1968 with the armed invasion of the Warsaw Pact. As Husák took on, in April 1969, the role of the first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (in the place of the reformist Alexander Dubček), it was the beginning of over twenty years of tough, neo-Stalinist and pro-Soviet course in the ruling party’s policy and practices. For cinema which in the “golden sixties” experienced a boom of the

<sup>111</sup> Cf. I. Zannier, “L’archeologica, casta fotografia di von Gloeden”, in: *Wilhelm von Gloeden. Fotografie. Nudi – paesaggi – scene di genere*, a cura di I. Zannier, Firenze, 2008, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted after: *ibid.* Ritz would perhaps say that male acts in Krška’s fairy-tales are so absolute, independent and free that “in their emptiness they come close to stereotype and kitsch”; *id.*, *Literatura w labiryntcie pożądania*, p. 197.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>114</sup> *30 případů majora Zemana*, dir. Jiří Sequens (1974).

<sup>115</sup> Quote from: B. Činátlová, “Dederon a stadion aneb Tělo poučené z krizového vývoje”, in: *Tesilová kavalérie. Popkulturní obrazy normalizace*, vybrali a uspořádali P.A. Bílek a B. Činátlová, Příbram, 2010, p. 128.

Czechoslovak New Wave, this meant disaster. It was the start of its profound reorganisation in the name of consolidating and normalising, but in reality in order to restore the party's control over the art environment. The earlier achievements were negated, with most notable films from 1956–1969 withdrawn from distribution, some ongoing productions were stopped, and dozens were sent to *trezor* (that is, shelved).<sup>116</sup> At the same time, the structures of cinema were rebuilt, existing film teams were dissolved and replaced with new, more submissive ones, verification and cleansing was carried out (preventing many artists from continuing their activities and in consequences forcing some to emigrate), and key positions filled with cynical and subservient apparatchiks, who uncompromisingly implemented party directives.<sup>117</sup> The production gave voice to conformists, promoted colourless mediocrities, and *de facto* reintroduced the aesthetics of socialist realism. It was the time of “dead seasons”, when – in addition to normalising propaganda films<sup>118</sup> – the cinema screens were flooded by tacky clichés and banal and bland entertainment.<sup>119</sup>

Scholars such as Jaromír Blažejovský or Štěpán Hulík note<sup>120</sup> that the atmosphere of normalisation trickled widely and infected the entire film production, and the touch of the prevailing ideology can be seen in contemporary comedies, psychological dramas or thrillers, historical films and in science fiction, films for children and teenagers... Next to the normalising propaganda, created for instance by Karel Steklý or Vojtěch Trapl, the face of the Czechoslovak cinema was the varied and countless normalisation films, including the popular and well-loved to this day comedies such as *My Brother Has a Cute Brother* by Stanislav Strnad, *Two Men Report Their Return* by Václav Vorlíček, *Romance for a Crown* by Zbyněk Brynych, *Summer With a Cowboy* by Ivo Novák, or *I Enjoy the World with You* by Maria Poledňáková.<sup>121</sup> The productions of this kind – in a popular, casual

<sup>116</sup> See e.g. J. Blažejovský, “Trezor a jeho děti. Poznámky k zakázaným filmům v socialistických kinematografiích”, *Illuminace*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 8–27.

<sup>117</sup> On normalisation in the cinema of the CSRS, see i.a.: Š. Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění. Počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov (1968–1973)*, Praha, 2012; id., “Nástup normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov”, *Illuminace*, 2010, no. 2, pp. 47–66; Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, pp. 6–11; J. Hoppe, “Normalizace a československá kinematografie. Dokumenty z archivu ÚV KSČ”, *Illuminace*, 1997, no. 1, pp. 157–201; Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, pp. 149–197; id., “Jak nastupovala v českém filmu normalizace”, *Illuminace*, 1997, no. 1, pp. 113–155.

<sup>118</sup> See fn. 6.

<sup>119</sup> Czechoslovak cinema of the seventies, as well as the entire period of normalisation, has traditionally been described using the adjective “grey” (*šedivý*). However, Petr Kopal believes that this “greyness” is not only an imprecise definition, but also unjust, and he proposes (after considering the likes of the achievements of Věra Chytilová, Jiří Menzel, Juraj Herz, František Vlácil or Oldřich Lipský, as well as e.g. exotic co-production ventures) talking about “strange, peculiar monster” (*bizarní monstrum*); “Jaká normalizace? Několik poznámek o (ne)normalizační filmové a televizní tvorby”, *Paměť a dějiny*, 2013, no. 3, p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, p. 8; Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění*, p. 291.

<sup>121</sup> Respectively: *Můj brácha má prima bráchu* (1975), *Dva muži hlásí příchod* (1975), *Romance za korunu* (1975), *Léto s kowbojem* (1976) and *S tebou mě baví svět* (1982).

and usually light form, without perceptible moralising – made an impression, as Hulík writes, as if they were “straight from life” and showed “the world we know and the people we meet in the street”.<sup>122</sup> However, it was a world which lacked room for doubt, whose image was complicated by nothing, and whose foundations were not disturbed. Even the contemporary critics noted that the reviewed films were “nice”, but “did not put high demands on the viewer”.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, they implicitly carried the ideology of normalisation and presented an official interpretation of the present or past. For example, the cinema hit (1,393,176 viewers<sup>124</sup>) mentioned earlier on, *My Brother Has a Cute Brother*, can be seen as charming and pleasant comedy also by today’s audiences, although in fact it presented an orderly, fake picture of youth in the 1970s and contained an impressive indoctrination charge.<sup>125</sup>

The film’s creator was Stanislav Strnad (1930–2012), first and foremost a provider of popular genre films, and one of favourites of the normalisation regime (along with the likes of Antonín Kachlák, Jiří Sequens or Otakar Vávra). As a graduate of The Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK), Strnad began his professional career in the late 1950s from the function of a co-director or assistant director at the first Czechoslovak-Soviet co-productions, such as *Six O’Clock at the Airport* or *May Stars*.<sup>126</sup> After an independent full-length feature debut, the 1962 *Key to Barbara*,<sup>127</sup> he worked in television for several years (where he had previously co-created the first Czech television series *Rodina Bláhova*<sup>128</sup> together with Jaroslav Dudek). He returned to the big screens with a hit in 1975, directing the comedy *My Brother Has a Cute Brother*, and three years made its sequel – *The Priceless Brother*.<sup>129</sup> In the meantime, he paid his dues to Husák’s team, adapting to the screen the “tacky, melodramatic idyll”, a novel by Antonín Zápotocký (a communist politician, in 1948-1953 the Prime Minister and President of Czechoslovakia) about the birth of the Czech workers’ movement, under the name of *Time of Love and Hope*.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Strnad created contemporary dramas and comedies, as well as thrillers (such as *Do Be Quick*, *Crash on the E4*, *Dreams About Zambezia*, the Polish-Czechoslovak *Arrest Warrant* and *The Orphan is not an Orphan*<sup>131</sup>), as well as the

<sup>122</sup> Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění*, p. 291.

<sup>123</sup> Tatiana Adamcová in the daily *Mladá fronta* of 11 July 1975; quoted after: H. Smolińska, “Mój brat ma fajnego brata”, *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, 1976, no. 16, p. 17.

<sup>124</sup> Březina, *Lexikon českého filmu*, p. 233.

<sup>125</sup> See Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, p. 8.

<sup>126</sup> Odpowiednio: *V šest ráno na letišti*, dir. Čeněk Duba (1958) i *Májové hvězdy*, dir. Stanisław Rostocki and Stanislav Strnad (1959).

<sup>127</sup> *Zámek pro Barborku*.

<sup>128</sup> *Rodina Bláhova* (1959).

<sup>129</sup> *Brácha za všechny peníze* (1978).

<sup>130</sup> Březina, *Lexikon českého filmu*, p. 64. Original title: *Čas lásky a naděje* (1976).

<sup>131</sup> Respectively: *Běž, ať ti neuteče* (1976), *Poprask na silnici E 4* (1979), *Sny o Zambezi* (1982), *Zátah* (1985) and *Není sirotek jako sirotek* (1986).

1980s television criminal series *Traces of Crime*.<sup>132</sup> After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, he never stood behind the camera again, and made no more films.

The work I considered symptomatic for the metamorphosis and reorientation of the way homosexual phantasms were represented on screen in the conditions of socialist realism, is the comedy *The Bronze Boys*, filmed by Strnad in 1980, that is, after the strongest offensive of normalisation had swept across cinema and in times of relative stability of the system. In the context I am interested in, the film seems to be significant enough to regard it as a typical “standard” normalisation work, representative of the “average” works of this era, which revealed the characteristics of the “normalisation style”,<sup>133</sup> and more importantly unintentionally reflected the actual effects of the ideological superstructure on the social and individual lives.

*The Bronze Boys* are one of many Czechoslovak films taking up the theme of Spartakiads, which were organised annually, and every five years crowned with huge shows at the Strahov Stadium in Prague, and which involved all social, professional, and age groups into scheduled sporting activity and collective gymnastics performances. Spartakiad films can be considered one of the “formats” of the normalisation cinema, often reproduced and recycled,<sup>134</sup> using a model once developed, approved by the authorities and tested in various fields of creativity and in relation to various target groups. As a result, we find here cinema and television Spartakiad documentaries,<sup>135</sup> next to films for children and teenage audiences (such as *Anna, Jana’s Sister*<sup>136</sup>), dramas (*Wandering of an Orienteer*<sup>137</sup>) or military comedies such as *The Bronze Boys*. Strnad’s film is an interesting case, combining two areas in a single image, both key for the Czechoslovak regime and propaganda: sport and the army. In *The Bronze Boys* the “Spartakiad format” meets the „army format”, which idealised and praised – usually in highly unpretentious, comedy formula – the advantages of basic military service, presenting it as endless male fun and, at the same time, an organic no. of the model “socialist way of life”.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>132</sup> *Stopy zločinu* (1983–1989).

<sup>133</sup> See e.g. the sub-chapter “Normalizační film jako styl” in: Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, p. 183.

<sup>135</sup> Such as *Československá spartakiáda 1975* (1975) and *Čs. spartakiáda 1980* (1980), dir. Rudolf Krejčík.

<sup>136</sup> *Anna, sestra Jany*, dir. Jiří Hanibal (1975).

<sup>137</sup> See fn. 7.

<sup>138</sup> J. Pinkas, *Reprezentace každodennosti tzv. normalizace v didaktické praxi*, in: *Film a dějiny 4. Normalizace*, ed. P. Kopal, Praha, 2014, p. 597. Examples of thus understood “military format” include the comedies *Two Men Report Their Return* and *What a soldier...* (*Copak je to za vojáka...*, dir. Petr Tuček, 1987) or the television series *Commander* (*Velitel*, dir. Zdeněk Kubeček, 1981). Hulík wrote that after watching a work such as *The Bronze Boys* nobody could doubt that serving in the people’s democratic army was the most wonderful thing in the world; id., *Kinematografie zapomnění*, p. 272.

## *The Bronze Boys*

This film is an uncomplicated, “convulsively optimistic”<sup>139</sup> story about a group of soldiers – good guys, who defeat initial adversity and prejudice, and enthusiastically prepare a tedious gymnastic routine for a national Spartakiad. After an impressive opening, showing spectacular aerial panoramas of the Strahov Stadium and performances of various Spartakiad groups, we see a team of soldiers whose spectacular gymnastic compositions bring great applause from the audience. The performers are proudly observed also by their superiors – majors Melichar (Josef Langmiler) and Rybár (Bronislav Križan); however, captain Chmelař (Ladislav Mrkvička), who has prepared the soldiers for the show, is missing. And it was not easy: the choreography of the routines is complicated and demanding, and Melichar does not relieve the Spartakiad performers from any routine military duties. During the sessions, Chmelař is pressured from all sides: coming back from the meetings with his girlfriend Eva (Jitka Smutná), he is late to the barracks and has to deal with spats among the soldiers, Melichar’s reprimands, as well as family problems. He therefore applies for a transfer to another unit, but his application is rejected. The soldiers, who overall like and respect Chmelař, are delighted that he is staying and decide to give their all during trainings. They even submitted themselves without grumbling to the duty of getting a tan, compulsory before the performances in Prague... Unfortunately, Chmelař has some bad luck at the last minute and accidentally breaks his leg, so he can only watch his subordinates on the television screen in the hospital. Either way, content with the results of his work, he changes his mind and will not be asking to be moved anymore.<sup>140</sup>

Either way, even from this succinct summary we can notice that the dominant element of *The Bronze Boys* is masculinity. It rules in the foreground, is at the centre of everything, it is the core of the explicit and implicit message. This masculinity is “typical”, “common” and “everyday” – no. of a pattern in which the army is the model of a community, and the binding material and shaping power of male-to-male relationships is team gymnastics training. In Strnad’s film, masculinity manifests and fulfils itself in “populist topography of masculinity”<sup>141</sup> – primarily in the area of barrack relations and mass rituals of sports in the fields and stadiums. This is where the normalisation model of “real” and “proper” relations between men is shaped in every aspect, and the combination of the army and Spartakiad “format” in one popular film product was to synergistically enhance the effect of its persuasive and regulatory impact.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Březina, *Lexikon českého filmu*, p. 177.

<sup>140</sup> I quote the content of the film from the extremely skilful summary in: *Český hraný film VI. 1981–1993. Czech Feature Film VI. 1981–1993*, Praha, 2010, pp. 182–183.

<sup>141</sup> G. Vincendeau, “Od Proletariusza do Ojca Chrzestnego. Jean Gabin i ‘paradygmat’ francuskiej męskości”, in: *Gender w kinie europejskim i mediach*, ed. E. Ostrowska, Kraków 2001, p. 190.

<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, the audience did not always buy into the popular form of propaganda content: *The Bronze Boys* had the lowest, apart from *Dreams about Zambezia*, cinematic audience of all

*The Bronze Boys* affirm and promote close relationships between men, such as those in the army and sports – based on cooperation in order to achieve common goals, mutual loyalty, identification and male solidarity. By sanctioning such military-Spartakiad bonds, the film tries to neutralise all “improper”, non-normative suspicions against them. Between the main characters of *The Bronze Boys* there is scratchy familiarity and confidential closeness – also physical, finding so many excuses and opportunities to realise itself in the barracks and training sessions – however they may not display openly erotic nature. The male collective of soldiers preparing for a Spartakiad cannot be sexually laden. Strnad’s film could therefore be considered to exemplify the tendency – described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and, according to her, characteristic for modern societies<sup>143</sup> (even more so for societies under authoritative rule, we should add) – to radically contest the continuity between male desires and publicly recognised homosocial bonds, and what is homosexual.

At the beginning of the film, two months before the Spartakiad, the soldiers are completely unprepared; they are a bunch of weaklings, lazybones and momma’s boys, who in the words of major Melichar perform a “circus show” or “an operetta” instead of exercise. However, drills and training will make them into people and form them into an efficient team. However, this will not be a “báseň”: poetry, something miraculous or wonderful (perhaps also emotionally and erotically) – as major Rybár is trying to comment on the field shows, perhaps even musingly – just prosaic “moje škola” (My School) of the blunt and authoritarian Melichar. This is the perspective in which the “real”, “proper” and “correct” masculinity is to take shape, affirmed by *The Bronze Boys*; the education in being a man is to happen through the army and sport (and, additionally through their ideologically prepared emanations on the screen), a man according to social and political expectations. In the film’s language, the product of the system will be the “dobří kluci” – “good guys”. We are dealing here with a configuration transferred into new conditions from the social realist cinema of the 1950s – the pattern of group socialist work and the power of the collective in forming a politically “conscious”, “model” unit.

However, Strnad’s film shows that it is about more than just propaganda shaping the model of “real” masculinity. The power machine – although it seemingly neutralises any erotic, especially “disobedient”, suspicions – simultaneously enters decisively into the territory of the body and its pleasures.<sup>144</sup> The military and the Spartakiad aim to reshape male body and eroticism in a way that supports the com-

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Strnad’s films – by the end of 1995 it was seen by 102,810 viewers, while e.g. *Key to Barbara* was viewed by 1,147,934, and even the propaganda film *Time of Love and Hope* attracted 190,225 viewers; Březina, *Lexikon českého filmu*, passim.

<sup>143</sup> E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Męskie pragnienie homospołeczne i polityka seksualności”, selected and translated by A. Ostolski, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2005, no. 9–10, pp. 176, 180.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. L. Williams, “Hard core”. *Władza, przyjemność i “szaleństwo widzialności”*, Gdańsk, 2010, p. 15.

munist order instead of undermining authority. It is therefore not only about political and social pragmatism, but also about sexual subjugation.<sup>145</sup> *The Bronze Boys* prove to be a symptom of how Husák's Czechoslovakia practically implemented a variant of the Foucaultian "device of sexuality". In this device, the Spartakiad and the army (with the support of film "formats") became a kind of useful public discourse – not only political and ideological, but also sexual. This discourse (in co-operation with other discourses) was to institutionalise male identity,<sup>146</sup> including sexual identity, and adjust, as if "sexual police"<sup>147</sup> ways male sensuality functioned and manifested itself. Strnad's film reveals in passing that in the conditions of the communist regime in the period of normalisation, the army and sport were not only centres of shaping patterns of masculinity and the function of "traditional" institutions of masculine homosocial desire (similar to, for example, various fraternities or *ad hoc* communities founded on hunting or football games) allowing to sublimate in a safe, socially acceptable form the sexual fantasies and (homo) sexual desires, but also, with their propaganda instruments, became elements of violence and tools of sexual subjugation, through which male-male relationships were also adapted to ideological norms and moulded for political purposes.

To paraphrase Marc Ferro, we could notice that the essence of this ideology and intentions of the military-Spartakiad discourse reveal themselves in *The Bronze Boys* already "at the level of style, at purely 'technical' level of how the camera is used".<sup>148</sup> Strnad's work can be classified into a certain group of normalisation films, juxtaposed with e.g. the parallel current of "socialist Baroque", characterised by many common means of expression<sup>149</sup> and operating in pseudoneutral (ergo: "male") style. The productions can also be assigned the features of a "zero-style cinema", that is a cinema which prefers content at the expense of the form, and whose language is normal and average, and the style invisible.<sup>150</sup> The economical and raw form of these films, resulting in something in the shape of a propaganda soap opera, appears as, to use the words of David Bordwell, "excessively obvious".<sup>151</sup> However, I believe it is key to recognise qualities in the style of *The Bronze Boys* diagnosed by Kevin B. Johnson on the example of Miklós Jancsó's *The Hopeless*

<sup>145</sup> See Kochanowski, *Fantazmat*, p. 30.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Williams, *Hard core*, p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. M. Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, Warszawa, 1995, p. 29.

<sup>148</sup> M. Ferro, "Przenikanie obrazów w filmie Żyd Süss", in: id., *Kino i historia*, Warszawa, 2011, p. 156.

<sup>149</sup> The films often began with some pathos (as in the case of *The Bronze Boys*) from the panorama of Hradčany, their staging resembled theatre or television plays, and the most important truths were communicated verbally, strengthening their ideological message with adequately selected music, and even commentary ("like in North Korean films"), etc.; Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, p. 11.

<sup>150</sup> M. Przylipiak, *Kino stylu zerowego. Z zagadnień estetyki filmu fabularnego*, Gdańsk, 1994, p. 58.

<sup>151</sup> D. Bordwell, J. Staiger, K. Thompson, *The classical Hollywood cinema. Film style and mode of production to 1960*, New York, 1985, p. 3ff.

*Ones*:<sup>152</sup> zero style, an aesthetic devoid of individual formation of film language, and, above all, a “cold” and disengaged camera (yet at the same time “intimate”) are the equivalent of the system of observation, represent an analogy or even extension of the supervision and surveillance implemented by the authorities.

The military-Spartakiad normalisation discourse proved so ruthless and efficient, that any direct suggestion of homoeroticism was erased in *The Bronze Boys*, or at least moved away.<sup>153</sup> However, this does not mean that a queer interpretation of Strnad’s work is not possible, and that treating it as a specific type of realising a homosexual phantasm would be invalid. On the contrary, following the footsteps of English-language scholars examining the homoeroticisation of social realist forms of expression,<sup>154</sup> we can say that the cynical tactics of removing homosexuality from the field of vision and consciousness paradoxically allowed (as I try to show, instrumental) use of elements of homosexual poetics and aesthetics.<sup>155</sup> A sign of such homoeroticisation in *The Bronze Boys* is primarily the abovementioned domination of masculinism (it is a “male film” in every way) and preference for the bare, usually aestheticised and idealised male physicality, manifested in the course of the film with a certain excess as a unique “flesh complex”, while at the same time a significant lack of structured and sovereign female component and clear signs of misogyny.<sup>156</sup> It is true that in Strnad we have several parallel plots

<sup>152</sup> *Szegénylegények* (1966); K.B. Johnson, “Eroticism, power, and fate in the cinema of Central Europe”, in: *Visegrad cinema. Points of contact from the New Wave to the present*, eds. P. Hanáková, K.B. Johnson, Praha, 2010, p. 49.

<sup>153</sup> Which does not stop the creators of the film to randomly (going out of the described film convention) wink at viewers and offer them morsels of playing on the stereotypical repertoire of themes associated with homosexuality, presenting them in the form of primitive jokes of cabaret provenience. And so in the barracks we have e.g. a comic figure – a slightly too soft, a bit overly emotional and obese cook, who envies the soldiers their participation in the Spartakiad and hurries to observe them in training. Another example of the “flirt with homosexuality” can be the farcical joke about how captain Chmelař overslept with Eva and, rushing to the barracks, he put on the girl’s funny and very short T-shirt (with a red heart on the chest), which Melichar caught him taking off in the locker room. The major’s reaction provides the punchline to the dress-up *qui pro quo*, reminiscent of the facial expressions and behaviour of the sexually ambivalent, foolish Commandant Lassard from *Police Academy* (the actor who plays him, George Gaynes, resembles Josef Langmiller, who plays Melichar), revealed for example with the suspicion that his protégé Mahoney, visiting the gay bar The Blue Oyster, may be homosexual; cf. B. Tousey, “The hidden mythos of Police Academy”, *PopMatters*, 25 January 2012, <http://www.popmatters.com/feature/143871-the-hidden-mythos-of-police-academy/> (access: 1 August 2015).

<sup>154</sup> E.g. E. Hobsbawm, “Man and woman in socialist iconography”, *History Workshop Journal*, 1978, no. 6, pp. 121–138.

<sup>155</sup> Jagielski writes that “homoerotic aesthetics could be used for propaganda purposes **only because** the representation of homosexuals, placed on the side of what was ‘abnormal’, alien, destabilising the socialist order, was wiped out of the public discourse, out of the cultural space”; id., *Maskarady męskości*, p. 257 (emphasis mine – K.S.).

<sup>156</sup> The barracks of the “bronze boys” can be considered as a specifically socialist, manufactured for the purposes of the film concretisation of the Männerhaus, “occupied by young men who have

about male-female emotional and erotic adventures, and even related “bedroom scenes”, but they seem rather bland, boring and generic, where tangible impulses of love and sex have been meaningfully eliminated, and where the female body, although belonging to young and attractive Czech actresses, is not exposed or clearly eroticised (the male protagonists of the bed scenes show much more), it remains practically asexual, appears in passing and does not move, functioning only as a “supplement to the world of male duties”.<sup>157</sup>

The idle plot of *The Bronze Boys* seems to be only an addition stuck onto the main attraction of the programme, that is the authentic images from the national Spartakiad of 1980. The trivial and not particularly engaging adventures of the tank regiment are a subtle plot “filler” of the story, completely subordinated – which was noticed without any objections even by contemporary commentators<sup>158</sup> – to just one aim: “to show the beauty of a great sport event”. Therefore, Strnad’s film is rather coarse, despite the appearances of anticipatory refinement: the plot about a group of soldiers preparing for a Spartakiad was cut up with documentary sequences of authentic Spartakiad shows at Strahov, edited into it as if a flash-forward.<sup>159</sup> The images were shot specifically for the film (or films, including Rudolf Krejčík’s documentaries – within the abovementioned recycling of the “format”), with the support of the army and the Spartakiad staff. At the same time, it is important for us that these sequences in *The Bronze Boys* include mainly male gymnastic routines of the male Spartakiad performers (marginalising other groups of participants), and the main focus, increasingly as the film progresses, on the programme of the soldiers presented at the end of the central Spartakiad. These shows at the Strahov Stadium anticipate what happens in the plot, depriving it to the end of any surprise and any features of a classic suspense design. However, in this episodic and “non-continuous visual experience” of Strnad’s work they serve the role of spectacular set pieces,<sup>160</sup> provoking a thrill of awe and admiration.

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already reached maturity, but are not yet married [...]. Entry into the bachelors’ house is completely forbidden to women and children, however young girls are welcome there” (according to Heinrich Schurtz’s definition of the “house of men”; quoted after: H. Blüher, “Teoria męskiej społeczności”, in: *Rewolucja konserwatywna w Niemczech. 1918–1933*, selected and edited by W. Kunicki, Poznań, 1999, p. 257.

<sup>157</sup> Anita Skwara’s definition: “Film socrealistyczny – ciało ekranowe jako inskrypcja ideologii?”, in: *Socrealizm. Fabuły – komunikaty – ikony*, eds. K. Stępnik, M. Piechota, Lublin, 2006, p. 319. In this context, what seems symptomatic is e.g. Chmelař’s romantic trouble, as he defends himself against deeper involvement in the relationship with Eva, and cannot come to an agreement with the girl on the nature and future of their relationship (the sexual connotations of the word “come” are more than relevant).

<sup>158</sup> See hs [H. Smolińska], “Anna, siostra Jany”, *Filmowy Serwis Prasowy*, 1977, no. 2, p. 15.

<sup>159</sup> However, we should say that among the crowd of soldiers taking no. in the show at Strahov we obviously do not see the faces of the protagonists of the feature no. of the film.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. T. Elsaesser, “Nowa Historia Filmu jako archeologia mediów”, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, 2009, no. 67–68, p. 13. Compared to *Labakan*, where visual and contemplative aspect prevailed, in *The Bronze Boys* we deal rather with the domination of performative elements and “the aesthetics of

The structure follows that of musicals, and even more that of pornographic movies,<sup>161</sup> if we consider the correlation between the way Spartakiad exercises are presented and placed in *The Bronze Boys*, and subsequent sexual acts in a pornographic work. What is more, in the organisation of Strnad's film we can recognise the features – described by Richard Dyer in relation to gay pornography – the structure of a “coming-to-visual-climax”,<sup>162</sup> in which the equivalent of ejaculation demonstrated in sight would be “living trampolines”, launched (as if in orgasmic orgasm) in the final of the Spartakiad show of half-naked soldiers, the equivalent of foreplay would be the soldiers' routine training in the barracks, while all fictional adventures would be just a necessary tribute to mark the action and link to the next spectacular “numbers”.

What I call a narrative “foreplay”, provides us with a few characteristic images of male physicality. There are several more or less extensive scenes of soldiers preparing to take no. in the Spartakiad in *The Bronze Boys*, training and practising their routine on the barrack pitch. Initially, the soldiers rehearse in blue, very flattering and fitted track suits (which highlight the nuances of the male shape), with tops opening deeply on their chests, alternatively in their track suit bottoms and white vests.<sup>163</sup> However, there is a scene in which the team hesitates before exercising in the pouring rain, and then captain Chmelař motivates his teammates, conspicuously getting rid of his tracksuit (real men are not afraid of any weather!). This entails a collective, solidary (half-)striptease. From then on, the soldiers train only in white shorts (*trenýrki*) and white trainers, baring their torsos and thighs. In fact, they do not just train and function within the barracks in these outfits, they also sunbathe in skimpy gymnastic shorts in the Spartakiad town in Prague, and walk around in the crowd of spectators on the streets of the capital after their successful final shows. (However, it is worth noting in this context the lack in Strnad's film of any scenes taking place in a locker room or in the showers, which are frequent and obvious in films set in the barracks or in the environment of sports teams.) All these sequences collectively show attractive, young and half-naked male bodies in motion with a some surplus – as a sort of “parade of attractions”.

The bodies of soldiers training this way are exposed to looks in *The Bronze Boys* – to a minimum extent looks of women, far more often the looks of other men – which leads to their eroticisation. And so men are, of course, among the

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wonder”; T. Gunning, “An aesthetic of astonishment. Early film and the (in)credulous spectator”, in: *Viewing positions. Ways of seeing film*, ed. L. Williams, New Brunswick, 1995, pp. 114–133.

<sup>161</sup> B. Farmer, *Spectacular passions. Cinema, fantasy, gay male spectatorships*, Durham, 2000, pp. 85–86. “The hard porn film [...] resembles musicals in terms of composition”; Williams, *Hard core*, p. 147.

<sup>162</sup> R. Dyer, “Coming to terms. Gay pornography”, in: id., *Only entertainment*, London–New York, 2002, p. 146ff.

<sup>163</sup> White vests (as well as T-shirts) have a long tradition of highlighting male sex appeal (see, for example, Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Elia Kazan, 1951).

spectators watching Spartakiad performers with enthusiasm from the stands of the stadium and on the streets of Prague; in the hospital – along with Chmelař, who is immobilised due to his broken leg – men are watching men, i.e. patients are following the soldiers' performances at Strahov, supporting their own gender with somewhat exaggerated, farcical emotion. Perhaps more inspiring in the search for (homo)erotic potential of the film are the images from the barracks, when the soldiers, training in their *trenýrky*, are watched by companions from their unit (including the cook, extremely interested in the shows and grotesquely presented), while major Rybár looks on surreptitiously from behind a window curtain.

In addition to the soldiers' training sessions and exercise, *The Bronze Boys* also have the previously mentioned "bed scenes" in which men reveal much more than their female partners. However, while in the former the bodies belong to fit young soldiers of conscription age, in the latter we see bodies of their superiors – mature men. Ladislav Mrkvička (aged 41) in the role of Chmelař, and especially Petr Skarke (37), in the supporting role of captain Krupička, openly display their clearly mature but still robust physicality, the latter even somewhat ostentatiously, although their nudity *au naturel* is kept in check by cotton briefs in rather plain "socialist" style (Chmelař puts them under the covers before leaving the bed he shares with Eva, and Krupička comes out of the shower wearing briefs!). In the case of Mrkvička it is difficult to resist the thought of certain degradation: the actor who appeared in New Wave films, and who had the opportunity to present pioneering, substantial nudity and shapely buttocks in Štefan Uher's *Miraculous Virgin*,<sup>164</sup> years later showed off his sex appeal in stretched underwear in normalisation films (not only in *The Bronze Boys*, but also in the *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman*). Either way, physical fitness and attractiveness of the captains is in Strnad's film on a par with the fitness and attractiveness of the younger privates. This carnal complacency of forty-somethings in good shape, supported by their position, experience, trustworthy character and charm – so appealing to young women, but also provoking respect in younger men – can be considered an example of a typical generational self-projection of the creators in the time of regime, recognised by Blažejovský in another of Strnad's film *Do Be Quick*.<sup>165</sup>

## Spartakiads

Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, the main event of the programme, and the star attraction of *The Bronze Boys* are the "show numbers" edited into the fabric of the film – authentic images from a gymnastics show performed by representatives of the Czechoslovak army at the end of the central Spartakiad at Strahov in June 1980.

<sup>164</sup> *Panna zázračnica* (1966).

<sup>165</sup> Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, p. 11.

Organised since 1955, Spartakiads became a flagship celebration and the most important ritual of communist authorities in Czechoslovakia, and its main political genre,<sup>166</sup> especially during the period of normalisation. They were a unique phenomenon on a global scale – nowhere else did shows of synchronised gymnastic exercises take on such scale,<sup>167</sup> and at the same time became the subject of a similar systematic political manipulation, and one of the primary tools of propaganda. Due to its mass character, cyclicity and “longevity” – as well as its mythicising potential, which the communist regime referred to and creatively used – Spartakiads are a domain where political, social, cultural and sporting phenomena of the time intertwine and reveal themselves.<sup>168</sup>

Bringing Spartakiads to life after World War II, Czechoslovak authorities alluded to an interwar communist tradition of physical culture, and the public gymnastic performances organised by the party from 1921 onwards.<sup>169</sup> While its genealogy and name referenced these, the organisation, scope or style of Spartakiads were to a larger extent a reference to an even earlier tradition of conventions and gymnastic performances of the Czech “Sokol” – an organisation founded in 1862 which played a huge role in the process of national rebirth (*Co Čech, to Sokol*, meaning: Every Czech a Sokol!), and until World War II was a strong, although bipartisan, social cultural, educational and political movement.<sup>170</sup> The rituals and festivals of “Sokol” arose, in turn, from the Central European culture and tradition of public gymnastics, forming in the second half of the 19th century<sup>171</sup> – and

<sup>166</sup> Činátlová, Dederon a stadion, p. 124.

<sup>167</sup> Some sample numbers to demonstrate the scale of Czechoslovak Spartakiads: the Strahov stadium, built in 1926, was the largest such object in the world, with an area of 6 hectares, or about eight football pitches; in 1985 on all levels of the Spartakiad: local, district, provincial and national, 2,186,900 gymnasts took part, watched by about 4,000,000 spectators; during the major gymnastic shows of the Central Spartakiad at Strahov in 1980 204,800 performed in 15 routines – divided into two afternoon programmes, each of which was repeated twice; in 1985 190,000 people participated in 15 routines, admired from the Strahov stands by 1,206,000 viewers (to compare: the “Sokol” convention in 1912 attracted 300,000 viewers); in 1960 290,000 gymnasts performed at the stadium in just one female show, entitled “Život vítězí nad smrtí”; the Spartakiad’s budget in the 1980s amounted to 600 million crowns, etc.

<sup>168</sup> P. Roubal, “Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj. Dvojí tvář československých spartakiad”, *Dějiny a současnost*, 2006, no. 6, <http://dejinyasoucasnost.cz/archiv/2006/6/jak-ochutnat-komunisticky-raj/> (access: 6 August 2015); Činátlová, Dederon a stadion, p. 125. As early as in 1927, Siegfried Kracauer analysed “the human mass ornaments” in collective gymnastic shows as “a reflection of the structure of the contemporary general situation”; however, he referred primarily to the principles of the “capitalist production process” and not to the totalitarian political systems; id., “Ornament z ludzkiej masy”, in: *Wobec faszyzmu*, selected and prefaced by H. Orłowski, Warszawa 1987, pp. 13–14.

<sup>169</sup> V. Thorne, “Těla v pohybu. Masová gymnastika jako kolektivní sociální představení”, *Sociální Studia*, 2011, no. 1, p. 108.

<sup>170</sup> In 1947, approximately one in twelve citizens of Czechoslovakia were Sokol members; *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>171</sup> At the root of all the “healthy mind in a healthy body” movements is the continuation of the ancient tradition of *kalokagathia*.

from the very beginning saturated with nationalist elements, and later totalitarian – which adapted mainly the German model of *Turnfeste* with their *völkisch* tradition of mass training sessions and sports performances. The purpose of the group exercises and shows was to create an image (but also mobilisation and homogenisation) of an ideal national community, characterised by fitness, strength, discipline and sporting spirit. Hundreds of bodies exercising at “Sokol” conventions or *Turnfeste* (almost exclusively male) became a symbol of a uniform, fearless and morally and ethnically pure nation, and collective performative acts of exercising men – a new form of national communication.<sup>172</sup>

However, Spartakiads, directly and indirectly inheriting all of these traditions, were to serve primarily the articulation and demonstration of the image of a disciplined, healthy, beautiful and happy socialist society in order to authenticate and legitimise the power of its leaders – the communist rulers.<sup>173</sup> Husák’s post-August normalisation team was in particular need of such sanctions, and the three subsequent Spartakiads<sup>174</sup> proved a blessing for them: a unifying and consensual celebration, and at the same time an ideological transmission belt, as well as a taming and vassalising instrument. On the other hand, the communists sought an ideal way of visually depicting the relation of power and subordination at the Spartakiad scene, which could be effective and fit for use in other media and propaganda channels<sup>175</sup> (e.g. in the film “formats” I mention here).

Czechoslovak Spartakiads eventually put emphasis on the celebration of the body.<sup>176</sup> The potential of the human body was multiplied in them, and the whole concept of mass gymnastic shows restructures so as to fully exploit, monopolise and appropriate it. As a result, the “polyphony of bodies” at Strahov can be treated as a perfect metaphor of the communist system, literally – as the subject scholar Petr Roubal notes – as its embodiment.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Roubal, Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj; id., “Politics of gymnastics. Mass gymnastic displays under communism in Central and Eastern Europe”, *Body & Society*, 2003, no. 2, pp. 1–25; id., “Krása a síla – genderový aspekt československých spartakiad”, *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum*, 2005, no. 2, p. 10; M. Filipowicz, *Panowie, bądźmy Czechami, ale nikt nie musi o tym wiedzieć...*. *Wzorce męskości w kulturze czeskiej XIX wieku*, Kraków, 2013, p. 146.

<sup>173</sup> P. Roubal, “The body of the nation. The Czechoslovak Spartakiades from a gender perspective”, in: *The politics of gender culture under state socialism. An expropriated voice*, eds. H. Havelková, L. Oates-Indruchová, London–New York, 2014, [https://books.google.pl/books?id=TU-3IAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Politics+of+Gender+Culture+under+State+Socialism:+An+Expropriated+Voice&hl=pl&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=The%20Politics%20of%20Gender%20Culture%20under%20State%20Socialism%3A%20An%20Expropriated%20Voice&f=false](https://books.google.pl/books?id=TU-3IAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Politics+of+Gender+Culture+under+State+Socialism:+An+Expropriated+Voice&hl=pl&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=The%20Politics%20of%20Gender%20Culture%20under%20State%20Socialism%3A%20An%20Expropriated%20Voice&f=false) (access: 6.08.2015); id., *Politics of gymnastics*, pp. 1–25.

<sup>174</sup> In 1975, 1980 and 1985 (after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact’s troops, the five-year cycle was broken and a central Spartakiad was not organised in 1970).

<sup>175</sup> Thorne, *Těla v pohybu*, p. 110.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Roubal, *The body of the nation*; id., *Krása a síla*, p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> Roubal, *Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj*. After this the text was completed, Roubal published a book (*Československé spartakiady*, Praha, 2016), which synthesises all of his findings from the existing articles I use here.

The multi-phase and all-encompassing project of Spartakiads, in which performances at Strahov accounted for only the tip of the pyramid of systematic and planned activities at the local, district, regional and central level, covering all ages and professional groups of men and women, is a symptomatic manifestation of how society was organised and structured in practice in times of real socialism.<sup>178</sup> Spartakiads reflected the desire of the communist regime to create a “new socialist man” and a new society. However, while “Sokol” activities focused on the individual and highlighted its personal physical characteristics, in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic the emphasis was on training masses. Spartakiads became an expression of a newly proclaimed way of life, in which, as Vladimír Macura wrote, individualism and loneliness were an unhealthy escape from the community, and perhaps even desertion and betrayal; the human individual gave way to the collective, and through participation in a Spartakiad – whether at the stadium or in the stands – it confirmed its involvement in social affairs, and in particular in the issues of building socialism.<sup>179</sup>

Each Spartakiad participant had their own *značek* (mark) assigned to them on the surface of Strahov, that is a specific position in the coordinate system, a place in the geometric network of markings covering the entire area of the stadium – and they moved according to a plan that was fixed in advance, coordinated with the immediate environment, and directed by a uniform idea of the “management centre”.<sup>180</sup> As a result, film images (also in *The Bronze Boys*) of human masses exercising according to this scheme bring a clear metaphor of the space of an individual in standardised socialist society – an individual reduced to an atom assigned to the x and y axes, vanishing in the masses and completely subordinated to the logic of the whole which overwhelms it, and to the unseen, from its own position (and preferably visible from the main grandstand) “higher purpose”. Roubal sees in this practical implementation of Foucaultian political anatomy – an implementation of biopolitics, in which a human being loses control of their body and movement, and becomes fully “readable”.<sup>181</sup> Also essential seems to be the uniformisation of the Spartakiad participants, which allows for replacing of individuals without the slightest detriment to the attractiveness of the collective body,<sup>182</sup> as well as the disappearance of a division into gymnasts and spectators: those exercising and those observing from the stands were one, and all became participants in the ritual. In this way, Strahov was the place where the ideological notion of “the people” became embodied, became reality during and through the Spartakiad.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>178</sup> K. Činátl, *Poetika normalizace. Filmové obrazy Československa sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let v školním dějepisu*, <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/poetika-normalizace> (access: 7 August 2015).

<sup>179</sup> V. Macura, *Šťastný věk. Symboly, emblémy a mýty 1948–1989*, Praha, 1992, pp. 65–66.

<sup>180</sup> Roubal, *Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj*; Thorne, *Těla v pohybu*, p. 113.

<sup>181</sup> Roubal, *Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj*.

<sup>182</sup> Filipowicz, *Panowie, bądzmy Czechami*, p. 146.

<sup>183</sup> Macura, *Šťastný věk*, p. 68; Činátl, *Poetika normalizace*; Roubal (*Jak ochutnat komunistický ráj*) problematises the dialectic of the metaphor and the reality, and wonders to what extent the

Unlike the conventions of “Sokol”, during which the national holiday of physical culture became simply a folk fete, Spartakiads were mainly “great historical events”,<sup>184</sup> correlated with celebrating anniversaries important for the authorities, and bonded with regime ceremonies – and further stages on Czechoslovakia’s way to communism. But in thirty years they changed their nature. Shows during the first Spartakiad in 1955 were dominated by the militant and industrial ethos of socialist construction, with the characteristic of the era metaphors of factories and machines; gymnasts represented representatives of specific social classes fighting for peace, and banners waved above it all – the whole resembling more monumental theatrical performances with avant-garde choreography than sports shows; more emphasis was placed on symbols (outfits, uniforms, tools, weapons) than fit bodies, which were only given the function of bearing ideological attributes.<sup>185</sup>

However, since the 1960s the approach to the bodies of those performing the exercise and to its meaning potential changes. Spartakiad performers no longer play roles of workers, farmers and soldiers – their place has gradually been taken simply by beautiful women, strong men and happy children, whose general image becomes an emanation of an equally general but emphatic message: in the 1950s we fought the enemy and built our homeland, now – in the 1960s, and especially 1970s and 1980s – we enjoy the benefits of socialism in peace and happiness.<sup>186</sup> In the arrangement of shows, the dominant categories become “beauty” and “joy”; a growing emphasis is placed on effective performance and excellence of shows. There is no room for either spontaneity or unpredictability, or for mistakes and random accidents (for instance stopping the exercise due to a downpour). The normalising Spartakiads begin to sink in the boundless aestheticisation and, on the other hand, are subjected to total semantisation and ideologisation.<sup>187</sup> As a synthesis of gymnastics, dance, music, and visual, literary and theatrical elements, they become a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, true “synthetic art”.<sup>188</sup> Propaganda and social engineering reveal a growing sophistication and innovation: explicit slogans and signs fade, all obvious framing and emblems disappear, and what comes to the fore, as Roubal concludes,<sup>189</sup> is the “natural” human body, in itself a powerful symbol.

There is therefore emphasis on the body and its functionality (also erotic), instead of attributes and qualities, and it is treated as a key building material of the whole sphere of meanings and messages. However, as I have noted before, and

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authorities managed to move the totalitarian Spartakiad project out of the Strahov Stadium and into other areas of social life, and to what extent participants of the Spartakiads appropriated their rituals and transformed them into Bachtin’s carnival opposite.

<sup>184</sup> Macura, *Šťastný věk*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>185</sup> Činátl, *Poetika normalizace*; Roubal, *The body of the nation*; Činátlová, *Dederon a stadion*, p. 125.

<sup>186</sup> Činátlová, *Dederon a stadion*, pp. 125–126.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125; Macura, *Šťastný věk*, pp. 65–69, 71.

<sup>188</sup> Roubal, *The body of the nation*.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

what I consider to be fundamental, is that in the Spartakiads of the normalisation era the focus is on exercising masses – while single, personal bodies dissolve into the crowd, and the crowd of gymnasts turns into one, joint, collective body. The nation and people appear as one, most somatic, body. The narration of gymnastic shows becomes “organicistic”,<sup>190</sup> and the mass of human bodies transforms into an ideologically marked ornament. In total, in the eventually formed normalisation model for all previous Spartakiads, all the previous symbols and references to the perfect socialist mechanisms have been extended with the metaphor of the body and the image of the human collective as a single whole.

However, this collective body, the organism was not asexual or androgynous. The separateness of male and female bodies does not disappear in the crowd – on the contrary, emphasising gender differences became a fundamental element of Spartakiad shows, and gender can be considered one of the key categories in shaping the entire ritual.<sup>191</sup> What is more, it can be treated as a model example of **instrumentalisation** of gender:<sup>192</sup> Spartakiads captured and transformed the organisation and symbolic characteristic for *Turnfeste* and “Sokol”, reflecting the traditional division of gender roles to strengthen not only the patriarchal order, but also the communist regime, by supporting its conservative social system in terms of sexuality.<sup>193</sup>

And so the collective Spartakiad body remained twofold. Although the shows stipulated gymnastic performances of men and women and boys and girls, as well as performances of parents with children and children themselves, they were outweighed by single-sex exercises. The strict separation of roles was the basis of the shows’ script and the primary point of reference for shaping their narrative. Not only the Spartakiads’ organisers, but also various advisory committees and supervisory authorities took great care so that the strictly feminine and strictly masculine character of the specific numbers was observed, and if it was necessary they intervened, ordering their respective “feminisation” or “masculinisation”.<sup>194</sup> As a result, two gymnastic styles developed, contributing together to the overall message of beauty, strength and happiness, but differing or even strongly contrasting in terms of the composition of choreography, the nature of the performance, their impact, symbolism and rhetoric, based on specific, underpinned with ideology, interpretation of the physiological and functional differences between the female and male bodies. Roubal synthetically characterised both these styles in the following way: the women’s shows were more dynamic, expressive and vivid, the exercises they comprised were more technically challenging, sophisticated and vertically-oriented (**from** the ground). At the same time, women’s movements –

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> P. Roubal, *Kráska a síla*, p. 13.

<sup>192</sup> H. Havelková, L. Oates-Indruchová, “Expropriated voice. Transformations of gender culture under state socialism; Czech society, 1948–89”, in: *The politics of gender*, p. 13.

<sup>193</sup> Roubal, *Kráska a síla*, p. 13.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–13.

unlimited by a strict grid of “marks” and more freely demonstrated on the entire surface of the stadium – were graceful and elegant, fluid, smooth, and expressed mainly in curved forms, ovals, waves and curves. Unlike women, men generally kept to their “marks”, and so the dominating geometric element of their choreographies were straight lines. Here performances were more strict – reminiscent of military drills and exercises, as well as traditional, horizontally-oriented gymnastics (**on** the ground); they were to express health, willingness and energy, and to show physical abilities and bodily prowess.<sup>195</sup> Miloš Forman recalled after many years, with complete seriousness, that in his youth he wanted to be a beautiful, tanned and able gymnast, and to have his “mark” as close as possible to the main grandstands.<sup>196</sup> A formative element of male performances was forsaking the female elemental, reluctance to disclose the female element, and often the absence of, or keeping distance from female bodies as company or partnership in exercises – one of the main purposes of this was to demonstrate that the body of male gymnasts are not feminine.

Such framing allowed to reveal and fully present the “absolute quality” of male physicality,<sup>197</sup> a testimony to the singular coupling of erotisation of the male body with ideological directives and political needs. Additionally, the general instrumentalisation of gender and eroticism, was followed in Spartakiads by an instrumentalisation of the codes of the homosexual look and lust and related *imaginarium*. Male group performances, especially in the final shows of soldiers, revealed the use of homosexual fantasies by the authorities (as well as sexual fantasies about men overall), while reversing their signs and neutralising their inversive connotations for the purposes of a “device of sexuality” in accordance with normalisation requirements. Men’s performances – of special beauty, idealised and aestheticised, but also with symptomatic choreographic solutions, erotic dialectic of dress and nudity, meaningful poses of the gymnasts and condensation graduated with sophistication of tension – where a pretext-free celebration of masculine physicality and sensuality. Sport and ceremony, with the regime’s *imprimatur* justified the intense look at male bodies and gave alibi which reduced any discomfort associated with it, blurring the distinction between “proper” homosocial relations and more sexualised relations.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Roubal, *The body of the nation*; id., *Krása a síla*, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup> Quote from: Roubal, *The body of the nation*.

<sup>197</sup> See fn. 91.

<sup>198</sup> Indirectly, the political design and ideology made it possible to brush off the appreciation for the erotic nature of the Spartakiad shows and the homoerotic component of male gymnastic performances. Therefore, there was non-sexual motivation, essential for men to look at the bodies of other men without resistance, and repression which was the *sine qua non* of enjoying the erotisation of the male body; cf. K. MacKinnon, *Love, tears, and the male spectator*, Madison–London, 2002, p. 109; S. Neale, “Masculinity as spectacle. Reflections on men and mainstream cinema”, *Screen*, 1983, no. 6, p. 8.

At the later Spartakiads, men's shows, both in single-sex groups and with female partners, were one of the key links of the Strahov spectacle. As a rule, the styling of male presentation used implicit symbolism of a healthy body, strong muscles, full-blooded good looks and sexual attractiveness. We should also note that contrary to the proper – neutral and even asexual – outfits of other Spartakiad groups, including women, the costumes (understood also as their lack) of boys or young men were usually bold and permissive, openly revealing, eloquent, and very sexual.<sup>199</sup> For example, in the 1965 programme, among the 16,000 girls and boys dancing cha-cha in pairs, the latter appeared dressed in boldly cut aquamarine swimming trunks; in turn, in 1975 one group of young men practiced in short *trenýrki* and T-shirts, while another – in fashionable white trousers, tight on the hips and thighs, and slightly broader at the bottom, which brought to mind more the western gloss and ease than with plain socialism, and in white T-shirts, cut low on their chests and arms, etc. Even if men performed fully clothed, as in 1980 the representatives of schools and Svazarm<sup>200</sup> (virtual acrobats, performing stunts in the air with giant metal swings) presented in full tracksuits – their light blue colour, combined with white piping, futuristic design, and flexible material, topped with a deep-V neckline, so perfectly emphasised the tan and enveloped the body that the gymnasts seemed extra sensual. No one else, however, undressed as much as the soldiers performing in the finals of the Spartakiads of the 1970s and 1980s. And their partial or almost full nudity had, as Roubal noted with a hint of irony,<sup>201</sup> only a very loose connection with promoting a sporty or healthy lifestyle... The soldiers exposed their young, slim and tanned bodies<sup>202</sup> to public view only in very short and fitted snow-white shorts and equally white socks, trainers and wristbands. They therefore exercised topless. Their image was stunning,<sup>203</sup> and when they performed the audience felt shivers down their spines (in original memories, this is more eloquent than in English: “toho úplně šel mráz after zádech”).<sup>204</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Cf. M. Bronski, *The pleasure principle. Sex, backlash, and the struggle for gay freedom*, New York, 2000, <http://www.echonyc.com/~stone/Features/PleasureEx2.html> (access: 31 January 2016).

<sup>200</sup> Svazarm (Svaz pro spolupráci s armádou) – a paramilitary organisation founded in 1951.

<sup>201</sup> Roubal, *Kráska a síla*, p. 11.

<sup>202</sup> According to the official interpretation – tanned during combat exercises and at training grounds, in reality – usually on the roofs of their units or (as shown in *The Bronze Boys*) e.g. in the tent town, just before the Spartakiad. In order to avoid red burns, but also for a better effect and a more attractive colour, soldiers rubbed themselves with paraffin oil (see reminiscences in: H. Šimanová, *Spartakiáda z aktérské perspektivy*, diplomová práce, Plzeň, 2013, p. 56, <https://otik.uk.zcu.cz/bitstream/handle/11025/8532/DP%20Šimanova%20Hana.pdf?sequence=1> (access: 13 January 2016).

<sup>203</sup> Karel Höger provides such a comment offstage in the documentary *Československá spartakiáda 1975*. Funnily enough, in Krejčík's Spartakiad films the lecturers were some of Krška's favourite actors: Höger and (in *Československá spartakiáda 1980*) Vladimír Ráž.

<sup>204</sup> Šimanová, *Spartakiáda z aktérské perspektivy*.

The shows of soldiers were within the Spartakiads a category of its own. A distinctive routine performed by representatives of the Czechoslovak army first appeared at the second Spartakiad in 1960, and from its style, structure and key components a certain repeated, although amended, standard was created practically right away – a fixed final element of the subsequent events, the most impressive and most expected by the viewers. The spectacular exercises of the scantily clad soldiers became “the icing on the cake” of the “Operation Spartakiad”. In *The Bronze Boys* we watch all the most important components of the seventeen-minute long performance of 1980 in chronological order (albeit cut and intertwined with the film plot).

The parade of military gymnasts had, at the time, highly ingenious dramaturgy accompanied by particular action – logically planned course of successive exercises and dramatic climaxes. It started with a crowd of men sprinting in, shouting “Hurrah!”, from the four corners of the completely empty stadium. Within 40 seconds, with breath-taking speed and spectacular vitality, 13,824 participants<sup>205</sup> took up positions on their “marks” and filled the entire surface of the Strahov stadium (in Strnad’s film, we admire this mostly from above, shot in long panoramas but deftly, as the whole film, edited by the brilliant specialist from Barrandov Studios, Miroslav Hájek).<sup>206</sup> In the beginning there is no musical accompaniment – only frantic yelling and ebullient physicality, spilling over six hectares of male element, but gradually it transforms into a geometrised human mass.

The performances begin with – as foreplay does – with non-intensive figures and gentle shifts. The performers bow, squat and swing as if during morning gymnastics; the lines slowly step, move in and out of each other; groups overlap from opposite directions, they either embrace or merge into one mass. Then come more and more intensive actions. Gymnasts regroup more dynamically, columns become circles, stars and waves, routines change faster. The living matter of the male mass tightens and expands. Spartakiad performers collectively dance, holding hands, lean on one another, do somersaults and stands, form complex team figures and mini-pyramids – in all of this we observe different types of interactions, touching, hugging, squeezing, rubbing... The exercises they present in pairs could, with the right dose of imagination, bring to mind positions from *Kama Sutra*. Men train in ritualistic concentration and tense poses: they stretch out, lifting their arms up,

<sup>205</sup> From: *Československá spartakiáda 1980*, ed. J. Chvalný, texts by Z. Šupich, Praha–Bratislava, 1981, p. 95, also Rudolf Krejčík’s films *Čs. spartakiáda 1980* (1980) and *Symfonie psané pohybem* (1988).

<sup>206</sup> Hájek, who from the beginning of the 1950s until 1989 edited about 280 full-feature films, was one of the key figures of post-war cinema, with a huge impact on New Wave films of Chytilová, Forman or Němec (his editing work on the latter’s *Diamonds of the Night* earned him in 1965 the name of the best film editor worldwide in the poll of the British “Films and Filming”); J. Bernard, *Jan Němec. Enfant terrible české nové vlny. Díl I: 1954–1974*, Praha, 2014, p. 97; Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění*, pp. 69–70.

bend forward and bend over, flex their biceps and puff out their chests – all of this gives (to use the description of a specialist and literary master<sup>207</sup>) “a pleasant effect of tension in [their] well-tailored” shorts.

Viewers of *The Bronze Boys* have an advantage over the stands, as Strnad’s film provides instruments to explore the phantasm playing out at Strahov: it is armed in translocators, lenses or steadycams, which allow to move around in the male crowd – “anonymous” movement, zoom in and out – and admiring the gymnasts from various, “unnatural” perspectives. We can circulate, moving from body to body. Each of them is attractive and appealing, but they are so numerous, that they seem accidental and interchangeable. Hypertrophy and luxury are born, oversupply exceeds the demand of the lustful glance. What could seem a fantastic paradise of promiscuity, promising unlimited choice and noncommittal collective elation, begins to seem more like a marketplace and a gathering of programmed, ideologically sexual androids or a paradoxical “darkroom” in the full sun of Prague summer. The quality of the male bodies becomes quantity. However, in the end also the quantity passes into quality, when geometric routines begin to resemble the designs from Hollywood musicals of Busby Berkeley. A crowd of exercising soldiers turns into a collective body – an extract of male eroticism – and a pansexual ornament with a twist of specific socialist glamour.

After the plateau stage, a parade of different configurations of exercises – it is finally time for the climax of the performance: the so-called *letky*. At the stadium men form, without any mechanical supports, several metre high human pyramids, which turn into live trampolines or rather launchers, shooting out bodies of gymnasts one after another, letting them glide fast and high in the sky that at the moment the body gymnasts, gliding and high in the air. The orgiastic jumps are appropriately accompanied by the “salvoes” of Zdeněk Křížek’s music. Similar actions take place simultaneously across the entire surface of the Strahov stadium, comprising the ecstatic ending of the Spartakiad, worthy of the final of the *Bolero*. The series of discharges, fountains or fireworks from the figures flying into the air are the ultimate act of glorification of the male body.

After this escalation of jumps the processes fade: gymnasts return to their initial positions in the regular grid of “marks”. We will not see it in *The Bronze Boys*, but the real ending to their performance was a relatively long moment when they stood up straight, out of breath and sweating, against the background of thunderous applause. In the television short *Spartakiad* by Stanislav Langer,<sup>208</sup> the camera shoots a panorama of busts of the soldiers winding down after their efforts, to eventually focus on close ups of a blond – tired but brimming within happiness (*post coitum non omne animal triste est*). His freeze frame ends this sequence, as the apotheosis of the Spartakiad as well as masculinity.

<sup>207</sup> A. Hollinghurst, *Obce dziecko*, Warszawa, 2012, p. 77.

<sup>208</sup> *Spartakiáda* (1980).

In Strnad's we cannot see what in human memory has become somewhat of a symbol of the events of 1980: the incredibly muddy men in continuing the show according to the original plans after a violent downpour that turned the surface of Strahov into a puddle.<sup>209</sup> Exercises in the rain and mud (of all groups of gymnasts) became a challenge to nature and the forces of fate, and most important show to subordination of the regime and supremacy ideology over nature. Nevertheless, this action was recorded by cameras of the reporters, and thanks to them we can see how the soldiers, in soaking and muddy shorts and trainers splashed around in the mud, ran, jumped and threw themselves into the puddles. The men's *trenýrki* were so wet and dirty, that in distant shots soldiers – evenly smeared with beige all over their bodies – looked completely naked. Sweat, rain and mud turned their shorts into shrunken rags, stuck between the buttocks, wrapping their hips and genitals. And when the gymnasts stood on their hands at the top of pyramids, the floppy fabric dropped down and revealed flesh-coloured, firm stains, which on the surface of the stadium formed an “op-art” pattern, glistening on its surface in grey weather.

However, these shows are closer to a sadistic military drill (fragments of Forman's *Hair* [1978] come to mind, with Claude Bukowski at the training ground) or to the competitions such as topless men wrestling in the mud, than to spontaneous, joyful and liberating games in the mud of Woodstock. There is something pathological, maybe even diabolical in the image of undressed men throwing themselves en masse into puddles under the banner of a sporting celebration, and then – filthy – enthusiastically dancing in circles. The peak of perversion seems to be the frames (naturally reminiscent of the visions of Leni Riefenstahl), in which thousands of mud-covered gymnasts flex proudly in the background of a great sign at the top of the stadium: “Za mír i socialismus” (For Peace and Socialism). In those frightening Bacchic rituals – especially when in parallel with the final jumps from the pyramids long lines of soldiers (so muddy that they seem “savage”) bow on their knees with their arms outstretched – we are suddenly incredibly close to Conrad's “heart of darkness” and images of Kurtz's stronghold in *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola.<sup>210</sup>

## Conclusions – determinants of the degeneration of homosexual phantasms

The norms defining and regulating the issues of emotional and physical intimacy between men are historical and cultural categories.<sup>211</sup> The society as a whole and

<sup>209</sup> Performances of gymnasts in the rain and puddles were an “attraction” not only of the 1980 Spartakiad; in 1985, Zdeněk Lhoták immortalised exercises of muddy soldiers during the final shows at Strahov in a series of famous black and white photos, one year later awarded the second prize in the World Press Photo competition (in the category of sports series).

<sup>210</sup> *Apocalypse now* (1979).

<sup>211</sup> Piotrowski, *Podwójny świat*, p. 17.

its individual members can assign very different meanings to the same emotions and the same behaviours in different cultures or historical moments, and at various stages of individual life. Affects or physical acts may be similar, but the social construction of meanings around them can be deeply distinct.<sup>212</sup> This involves a research risk and “potential regressive interpretation” in the case of excessively voluntary identification of homosexual themes and examples of behaviour, and looking for homosexual form in films created in recent or distant past, as it may mean imposing present categories of the current discourse, and projecting the contemporary understanding of homosexuality onto cultures and times in which a different meaning was attributed to men engaging in same-sex relationships.<sup>213</sup>

On the other hand, we cannot depreciate intuition, imagination or fantasy and deprive them of legitimacy in scientific investigation, especially when confronted with works of art and artistic creations. Intuition and imagination can be a prolific impulse, a certain “far-sighted” research instrument, and a reservoir of analytical invention. Thanks to them we can try to effectively capture and objectify the “third meaning” of films postulated by Roland Barthes: the redundant, open and elusive “level of the potency of meaning” – exceeding anecdote and psychology of creations, their informative and symbolic level – engaging viewers individually, and at the same time, intersubjective, as it is “persistent” and “obvious”.<sup>214</sup> Thanks to the power of intuition and imagination, we can also decode the “content surplus” in films,<sup>215</sup> which allows us to reach the spheres of socio-political reality, coupled with their creation and invisible or difficult to capture. The film, occupying the intersection of the real and the imagined, according to Ferro may be a source of historical studies, primarily because it is a symptom enabling to “reveal what is hidden behind the explicit, the invisible through the visible”.<sup>216</sup> In an unintentional way the camera reveals, according to the French historian, the “hidden side” of the society and the actual functioning of its institutions of power, always saying more about them than they would like to show.<sup>217</sup>

I therefore decided to treat *The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys* precisely as symptoms and “privileged forms of ‘visions’”,<sup>218</sup> uncovering secrets and lapses

<sup>212</sup> J. Weeks, “Discourse, desire and sexual deviance. Some problems in a history of homosexuality”, in: *Culture, society and sexuality. A reader*, eds. R. Parker, P. Aggleton, London–New York, 2014, p. 122.

<sup>213</sup> See Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish*, p. 179.

<sup>214</sup> R. Barthes, *Trzeci sens. Poszukiwania na podstawie kilku fotogramów z filmów S.N. Eisensteina*, “Kino” 1971, no. 11, p. 38.

<sup>215</sup> M. Ferro, “Film jako kontranaliza społeczeństwa?”, in: id., *Kino i historia*, p. 59.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40. See also Kracauer, *Ornament z ludzkiej masy*, p. 11: “The place an era holds in the historical process can be described much more accurately on the basis of analysing its superficial, insignificant phenomena, rather than based on its own judgments about itself [...]. Due to their unconscious character they allow for a direct access to the essential content of the era”.

<sup>217</sup> Ferro, *Film jako kontranaliza*, p. 38.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

not only of their creators, but also of the society and authorities – for a particular place and a specific era. I aimed much more to reveal something that objectively existed, and actually functioned, than to perform “intellectual gymnastics” and created another discourse, more or less compatible with the fashionable paradigm of research. I decided, therefore, that the creative fictions, fabrications and artistic designs in the Krška’s and Strnad’s films in a paradoxical way reflect the mental reality of their times, inadvertently and *à rebours* illustrating the contemporary socio-political context, and translating ideology to the everyday, as well as “transcribing”<sup>219</sup> a fragment of the truth about Czechoslovakia of the 1950s–1970s into accessible, “popular” categories. I therefore consistently assumed that it is possible to reach the structures and specific determinants of (communist) power, understood as “a complex strategic situation in a given society”,<sup>220</sup> and its evolving ideology and practices of control – in a way which is probably somewhat unusual, but very apt – by decoding and confronting the homosexual visions and phantasms in Krška’s and Strnad’s works. This attitude seemed particularly relevant in relation to the type of authority operating with “norm as its basic instrument”, whose success “is proportional to the quantity of mechanisms which it manages to hide”<sup>221</sup> – including mechanisms determining what counts as (homo)sexuality, and what forms it takes,<sup>222</sup> as well as specifying the scope and ways of using (homo)sexuality.

I tried to demonstrate that *The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys* are – in a literal sense of these words – “male films”: with a dominant male element, male optics, direction and focus on men. The main content, real object and meaning of these works, seems to be the omnipresence of male bodies and their meaningful representation, consistent with the logic of homosexual look and desire. A certain pan-sexualism of Krška’s and Strnad’s works allows for the characteristic flesh complex to reveal itself, in which the image of the male body can be considered a homosexual image.<sup>223</sup> Also, in each of these films we find an expression of male dreams of other ideal, attractive men and on-screen realisations of fantasies about unique, potentially exciting situations, adventures and male-to-male relationships. I therefore consider it to be a concretisation of homosexual imaginings and materialisation of fragments of the homosexual *imaginarium*.

*The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys* are different in terms of style and quality, they also belong to different genres and refer differing aesthetic models (which incidentally enforced different tactics to searching for them: more straightforward and “obvious” reading of Krška’s work, and putting off pretences and looking for elliptical meanings in Strnad). Each of these works also incorporates the flesh

<sup>219</sup> Marc Ferro’s definition: “Paradoks Pancernika Potiomkina”, in: id., *Kino i historia*, p. 207.

<sup>220</sup> Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, p. 84.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Męskie pragnienie homospołeczne*, p. 177.

<sup>223</sup> Ritz, *Literatura w labiryncie pożądania*, p. 196.

complex of corporeality in a different way, realizing different variations of the phantasm and exposing slightly different parts of the world of homosexual imaginations. In *The False Prince* we are in a stylised, radiant and timeless Orient, provoking sensual desires and stuffy emotions; whereas in *The Bronze Boys* we land in a Central European *metropolis*, in a fairly flat reality of real socialism, where we somehow have to find ourselves with our longings. The first film is based on the exotic fantasies about the Unfamiliar – a lover from the East, and “primitive” societies, with their “natural” approach to physicality; the second works with more mundane sports and military fantasies, and homo-fantasies about the Familiar: an “ordinary”, “normal” man (albeit ideally a gymnast or a soldier) as the object of desire.<sup>224</sup> Krška’s wants are more sophisticated, and his feelings more extreme, while Strnad’s fancy is more churlish and his film resembles a softcore staging of unrefined locker room or barrack stories. Nudity in *The False Prince* or *A Legend of Love* is like illustrations in *One Thousand and One Nights*; the Spartakiad physical routines in *The Bronze Boys* sometimes look like they are from de Sade’s<sup>225</sup> book and bring associations not so much with *Olympia* or *Triumph of the Will* by Riefenstahl (the founding mother of the totalitarian myth of uniquely male and homosocial beauty<sup>226</sup>), but rather with the Soviet sports photographs of Alexander Rodchenko and Boris Ignatovich, or with German film paeans in honour of hygiene and physical culture such as *Körperkultur (Ways to Strength and Beauty)* by Wilhelm Prager.<sup>227</sup>

However, more than the specificity and unique qualities of both films (reflecting the individual self and the era in a static perspective) I was interested by the discrepancy between them (their clash in a dynamic perspective). The difference between the works of Krška and Strnad – extracting what happened in them and “between” them with homosexual imagery – lets us capture a fundamental change in the quality which occurred in Czechoslovakia between the second half of 1950s

<sup>224</sup> Incidentally, during the filming of *The Bronze Boys* it was in keeping with the current trends in homosexual erotica and pornography (visible even in the 1970s and early 1980s in the monthly “Playgirl”), promoting mostly men in the type of a regular “boy next door”.

<sup>225</sup> Jan Švankmajer used these associations in his 1976 collage *Tělesná výchova ve službách erotismu a militarismu (hra analogit)* (see e.g. in: J. Švankmajer. *Dimensions of dialogue / Between film and fine art*, concept and text F. Dryje, B. Schmitt, Praha, 2012, p. 147) and in an animated short from 1990 (*The death of Stalinism in Bohemia*), in which photos from soldiers’ Spartakiad shows were collated with illustrations to the works of de Sade.

<sup>226</sup> J. Rawski, “Seksowny faszyzm jako egzemplifikacja relacji płci i władzy”, *Teksty Drugie*, 2015, no. 2, p. 305.

<sup>227</sup> *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, 1925; see more: A. Gwóźdź, “Drogi do siły i piękna albo o kulturze czasu wolnego w kinie Niemiec weimarskich”, in: *Kino niemieckie w dialogu pokoleń i kultur. Studia i szkice*, ed. A. Gwóźdź, Kraków, 2004, pp. 56–58. The film was screened in interwar Poland (among other places, from 1925 in the Warsaw cinema “Palace”), and the daily *Kurier Poranny* advertised it at the time as “the most beautiful specimens of humanity in the full glory of naked beauty”; quoted after: W. Świdziński, *Co było grane? Film zagraniczny w Polsce w latach 1918–1929 na przykładzie Warszawy*, Warszawa, 2015, p. 168.

and the turn of the 1980s in terms of sublimation and transfer to the screen of these ideas and in the general way masculinity in the cinema is shown and sexualised. And the difference and the swap are proof of the regression and degeneration,<sup>228</sup> as a result of i.a. annexation. For example, in *The Bronze Boys* (including the Spartakiad images in the film) we can see how homosexual phantasms – which for Krška could be still a stimulant for personal expression and practicing opposition, and certainly at least inner refuge and escape – have been appropriated, “redirected” and instrumentalised by the authorities, becoming no. of its normalising systemic procedures, a tool compatible with ideological requirements and political needs of the “device of sexuality”, and a tool for taming measures. We can also say, transposing the observations of Kroutvor about the importance of culture for a small (Czech) nation,<sup>229</sup> that homosexual phantasms – revealed in films or literature – could be a (sexual) minority policy, proving and justifying its existence. However, in the times of normalisation, “the despotic power” managed to ideologise them and subject, “overwrite” them with official interpretation, thus ridding the minority of one (the only possible?) political instrument. Recognising the change in this exceptional matter described here refers in turn – as a symptom – to more general processes and phenomena (such as “modernisation” of governing style, redefining privacy, etc.) and allows us to observe, even partially, the abovementioned “hidden side” of the society embarking on the way from socialism to communism. It also becomes possible to describe in no. the difference between the communist authorities in two moments: during the thaw and leaving Stalinism in the mid-1950s, and in the age of regime aiming in the 1970s to consolidate and normalise.

And so, (homo)sexuality, from a domain of personal fantasy (which, however, in the conditions of communist cinema, always remained political in the end<sup>230</sup>) decidedly entered the arena of politics. While *The False Prince* practiced a kind of escapism and inherently located dreams and desires **outside of history** – in a different, better world, *The Bronze Boys* did not allow for such a position, involving homosexuality **into history**, submerging it in the “here and now”, at a particular time of a particular socio-political system.

The determinants of regress and degeneration, described here and later on, meant that films were brought from the level of art and a creative act to the level of

<sup>228</sup> Petr Weigl’s film *Radúz and Mahulena* (*Radúz a Mahulena*) from 1970 can be considered one of the symptoms and an intermediate stage of this process. Everything that which in *The False Prince* was “popular”, real, natural and unceremonious, in Weigl’s film evolved into elite, overly styled, and artistic. Krška’s strategy could be described as a quest to say and show as much as possible within what is allowed, while Weigl’s strategy is rather to sublimate, camouflage and replace homosexual phantasms into the *decorum*.

<sup>229</sup> Kroutvor, *Europa Środkowa*, p. 231.

<sup>230</sup> See more: K. Szymański, “Film czechosłowacki odnaleziony”, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, 2011, no. 75–76, pp. 327–328.

ideology and servitude. Normalisation works were often, surprisingly, *auteur* films (which was the case of a few of Strnad's creations), but remained first of all art of class and the communist party.<sup>231</sup> Meanwhile, Krška's works – although they did not meet the formal criteria (the director did not write the screenplay etc.), had a stamp of the creator's personality and undoubtedly constituted *auteur* work<sup>232</sup> – were thoroughly individual and partyless; they cannot even be considered as films reflecting their community (even if we accept the ambiguity of this term).

Moving Ritz's findings in the area of literature to the field of cinema,<sup>233</sup> it can be said that the discourse of *The Bronze Boys* which seems to be neutral and pragmatic (very adequately to the "zero style" of the film), in reality it is seemingly neutral or pseudo-neutral, in order to simulate being a male discourse. While the discourse of *The False Prince* sticks to neutrality in another sense – it wants to remain without a label (of a fantastic, erotic or emancipation film, for example) and not subject to limitations in order to have an equal position with (male) dominant discourse. We can therefore see Krška's artistic strategies through the prism of creating his own, **subjective language** and positioning it as equivalent to other languages – valid or dominating. Meanwhile in Strnad, there is **loss** of invention and **independence of language** (also in terms of expressing desires and erotic imagery), its "blurring" and "disarmament" – due to camouflage and impersonating a hegemonic, seemingly neutral (because "politically correct") male discourse.

Both films therefore express a different type, different stage of Orwellian double-think. In Krška we can observe an earlier stage – causing less destruction and expressing some strategy of resistance – in which we deal with exploitation and refuge into creative and ambiguous nature of language, and hiding the real meanings by using imagination, symbolism, allusion, allegory, ellipses, styling. Strnad's film, including the entire project of Spartakiads, is no longer a representative of the actual doublethink, prescribing phenomena, emotions, ideas, etc. under the dictate of power, and writing facts and history anew, which involved (in this case – in the realm of homosexual imagination) with a paradoxical (perverse?) subversion: annexing meanings and reversing signs, tearing off names and objects of thoughts and emotions from their referents, and renegotiating genealogy and existing contexts. The effect is also that *The False Prince's* appears as an unfunny – implicitly serious – tale/non-tale, and a film "**about something else**", while *The Bronze Boys* seems unfunny because it is unsuccessful – a barrack farce and a film **about nothing**.

<sup>231</sup> Blažejovský, *Normalizační film*, pp. 8, 11.

<sup>232</sup> Let us remember Němec's opinion about Krška as the first author of Czechoslovak cinema; see fn. 39.

<sup>233</sup> G. Ritz, "Iwaszkiewicz, Breza, Mach. Niewypowiadalne pożądanie a poetyka narracji", in: id., *Nić w labiryntyce pożądania. Gender i płeć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do modernizmu*, Warszawa, 2002, pp. 177–178.

In terms of style, a comparison of Krška and Strnad's works shows the ambivalence of the opposition between kitsch and "progressive art" characteristic for the cultural policy of communist authorities. It turns out that there is kitsch and there is kitsch. If we were to look for its marks in *The False Prince* or *A Legend of Love*, we would have to consider these films as "normal", "ordinary" kitsch, based on exaggerated aestheticism and visual splendour, full of excess and refinement, looking at great affection and theatrical gestures (and these marks, as I have already mentioned, move any kitsch quality of Krška rather towards the aesthetics of glamour or queer stylistics). "**Traditional**" kitsch of these works would also involve creating beautiful, unreal, dream worlds; it would take on the form completely opposite to all realistic or documentary forms, contemplating fairy-tale and oriental picturesqueness. We can consider *The Bronze Boys* to be a typical representative of the "**socialist kitsch**" – in its particular type called "normalisation kitsch" by Jan Lukeš.<sup>234</sup> Krška's kitsch was expressed as if in wavy lines – Hogarthian "lines of beauty", while Strnad's kitsch – only in straight lines.<sup>235</sup> The plain, soap opera-like plot no. of *The Bronze Boys* shows well what the socialist kitsch of shortage and savings, narrative and aesthetic accessibility for all classes, lack of panache and directness, and decreed simplicity (or: vulgarity) of tastes. In turn, the Spartakiad sequences illustrate how something theoretically natural, realistic, and documental changed its nature in the ideological spectacle and turned into hyper-realistic kitsch (and in some sense even in "monumental kitsch", close to the works of Riefenstahl), which, in a completely different way from Krška's fairy-tales used visual excess, stylisation and aesthetics, as a result still constructing an unreal, imagined world (here: by the authorities) – distant from the realities of contemporary Czechoslovakia. The status of this unreal world, modelled by Spartakiads of the era of normalization was, however, completely different from the status of fantastic worlds projected by Krška's imagination.

Věra Chytilová perfectly sensed the hyperrealism of the Spartakiad shows, using photographs from the Strahov stadium from 1980 in one of the sequences of her documentary *Prague – Restless Heart of Europe*.<sup>236</sup> By giving the montage a clear rhythm, speeding up the picture and illustrating it with reeling music and convoluted singing of the defiant Michael Kocáb, she transformed the bird-eye view of the thousands exercising bodies into geometric, abstract, op-art like patterns.<sup>237</sup> Through aggressive styling of the gymnastic displays, and bringing their

<sup>234</sup> Lukeš, *Diagnózy času*, p. 186.

<sup>235</sup> When writing about mass sport shows, Kracauer states: "the ornament is an aim in itself. [...] The mass movement of girls hangs [...] in a vacuum, it is a system of lines" and "Groups of girls train [...] in order to create countless parallel lines. [...] The exuberance of organic forms is abandoned"; id., *Ornament z ludzkiej masy*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>236</sup> *Praha – neklidné srdce Evropy* (1984).

<sup>237</sup> S. Přádná, "Balancování na hraně možného. Tvorba Věry Chytilové v období normalizace", in: *Film a dějiny 4*, p. 50.

visual dimension to an extreme, Chytilová left behind the direct ideological or political connotations and attacked the Spartakiad project from another angle: by showing its fascinating, yet “suspicious” aesthetic, revealing its ambiguous ethical tone. She did not ridicule it, but realised that behind the captivating and spectacularly beautiful façade there were both poor tastes and authoritarian motives; by extremely deforming the image, paradoxically she did not deform the nature of Spartakiads, only reaching its real character – monumental, dehumanised and perfectly controlled.

The Spartakiad kitsch mirrored the kitsch of May 1st parades and other mass events, filled with collective emotion, staged joy and energy, and group optimism. *The Bronze Boys*, as well as other films in the Spartakiad “format”, or many normalisation works in general, were to be an equivalent and an extension of such emotions and attitudes. When confronted with such a socialist kitsch, the kitsch-ness of Krška’s films must have been “un-progressive” and “reactionary”. And the cultural policy of the communist authorities fought with reactionary capitalist kitsch, as it was in opposition to the educational and propaganda tasks of state cinema, which supported the society that built socialism. It is worth noting, however – after John Haynes, who compared Hollywood romances and socialist realist comedies – that socialist kitsch and capitalist kitsch had similar functions: stimulating desire and upholding the belief that an object of this desire (without going into what this would be) is attainable; in fact they confirmed the socio-political *status quo*.<sup>238</sup> We should also add that both retrogressive capitalist kitsch, which *The False Prince* may be associated with, as well as progressive art embodied in the socialist kitsch of *The Bronze Boys*, likewise proclaimed that utopia is attainable in our earthly life. Except that it was about radically **different utopias**. Krška presented a sentimental-nostalgic version, very sensual and escapist, directing towards ideal and idealised worlds as spaces of personal freedom and realisation of desires. In addition, (like the later trio James Ivory, Ismail Merchant, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, who created first the myth of India and then of Edwardian England), Krška created the utopian South Bohemian land, and then – in *The False Prince* and *A Legend of Love* – a mythical Orient, where creators and viewers could find, meet, and understand the Other, the Unfamiliar, crossing barriers of class, race, intellect, and finally sexual ones. Strnad’s film gave voice to the Spartakiad utopia of the contemporary society, temporal, pragmatic and hermetic, self-glorifying and self-destructive in the pursuit of the mirage of communism, at the expense of individual goals and dreams.

*The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys* – as representatives of popular and mainstream cinema reflected the current images of masculinity, and at the same time created ideal and desirable ones. In this context, we can look at both titles

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<sup>238</sup> J. Haynes, *New Soviet man. Gender and masculinity in Stalinist Soviet cinema*, Manchester, 2003, p. 186. As a result, the questioning dimension of *The False Prince* discussed later on, would nevertheless dispute the films basic kitschness.

as revealing the confrontation of two completely different visions and patterns of masculinity, present for two centuries of cultural and social life, since 19th century, “created by two channels of mass culture”: the “Sokol” and popular masculinity.<sup>239</sup> The “Sokol” masculinity – founded, as similar contemporary forms (e.g. masculinity in the *Turnfeste* rituals), on the love of physical beauty with the cult of friendship (encouraged in the German cultural area as the idea of *Männerbund*) – has been used, as I have already mentioned, by the Czech nationalism to create national symbols and strengthen the indigenous community. In this system, the male body became a symbolic, joint, national body, which in the time of normalization evolved into a collective body of the state or even the party. In contrast to the hegemonic “Sokol” pattern was a popular one, contesting and deconstructing the oppressiveness of the first, and personified by (anti)heroes, mainly plebeian, endowed with features stereotypically associated with Czech men, or more broadly: “with the small Czech man”: pragmatism, individualism, prosaic quality, hedonism, etc.<sup>240</sup> Such heroes gradually took up more and more space in the collective consciousness.<sup>241</sup> Labakan can be considered one of particular mutations of the popular pattern of masculinity, and *The False Prince* – one of the symptoms of the process in which the patterns clashed and negotiated their place, and the process of dethroning the hegemonic pattern – expressed not least in departing from masculinity and physicality which was national, collective, mass and expansive, in favour of the recovery of masculinity as something own, individual, introverted and intimate. *The Bronze Boys*, however, showed a reversal of tendencies in the normalisation period, and a return to the dominance of the “Sokol” model in Czechoslovak cultural, social and political life – modified, modernised in propaganda terms, and decreed as “the only right one”.

In the world of Krška, homosexual imagination created a space for **individualisation and building subjectivity**, while in the world of Strnad it was a field of depersonalisation, **collectivization and de-subjectification** (or even objectification). Male desires and fantasies in *The False Prince* are defined with the main character’s life ambitions, his social and material aspirations, and his impulse to change his status. The film *The Bronze Boys*, despite the sport theme, distances itself from any connotations with individual ambitions and successes or comparisons and competitions – probably too strongly associated with western sport. Spartakiad successes in Strnad are linked to socialist, conscientious work, efficient organisation as well as teamwork and responsibility for the team,<sup>242</sup> rather than to “capitalist”

<sup>239</sup> Filipowicz, *Panowie, bądźmy Czechami*, p. 139. It shows a continuum of a fixed dichotomy of the romanticism and the Biedermeier, expressed e.g. in the clash and simultaneous infiltration in the Czech Republic of two attitudes formed by popular culture: that of a romantic rebel and a Biedermeier philistine; *ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>241</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 255–256.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Činátlová, *Dederon a stadion*, pp. 124–125.

training sessions, personal development, competition and personal gain. We can see the shift even in comparison with the masculinity project within the “Sokol” tradition: a place of the individualised collective was taken in the Spartakiads by a collectivised individual.<sup>243</sup> For Krška’s hero, his own needs and desires are the most important, and he does not hesitate in crossing the social or moral lines for them. Strnad’s heroes devote themselves to the interests of the company and to the idea of the Spartakiad – they blend in with the communist system and transmit its propaganda image and norms to their fellow citizens (also those connected with “unrighteous” sexual assumptions adopted for the purposes of the authorities), becoming an instrument of social “self-totalism”.<sup>244</sup> The contradictions described here could be expressed synthetically in opposition to the image of an individual trapped between what they are and what they would not just like to, but could become (in Krška’s film) as well as an individual imprisoned between who they are and what they should and must be (in Strnad).

The plots of both movies are stories of overcoming obstacles on the road to realising some male purposes and objectives. While in the work of Krška, Labakan’s adventures make up a kind of “éducation sentimentale”: a formative social, moral, and existential education, in Strnad the soldiers joining the Spartakiad project are building a kind of a socialist work force, passing through the collectivisation **regime of the camp** and are subjected to body- as well as brainwashing<sup>245</sup> without a distinct individual reward or personal development. They do not even experience a shade of “the unbearable lightness of being”, whose burden Labakan seems to have already sensed. The anecdote of both *The False Prince* and *The Bronze Boys* can be reduced to the pattern of “transforming a frog into a prince”, except in Krška’s dreamed metamorphosis of the young tailor into the Sultan’s son corresponds to his perfectly real transformation into someone rather bitterly experienced and frustrated with the turn of events, but at the same time invariably vigorous and self-aware, a master of his own fate („prince-rebel”), while in Strnad, the soldiers become “the stars of one evening” (the authorities will allow them to shine for one moment at the stadium, and then as “prince-companions”, shining in the streets of Prague among the crowds, in the glory of well-fulfilled duty), they do not acquire any special life knowledge and remain blunt puppets, passive but healthy links of the collective, devoid of the possibility of self-determination cogs in the system. While Krška’s fairy tale about Labakan can be treated as a demonstration of a specific (and characteristic for the homosexual experience) process

<sup>243</sup> Thorne, *Těla v pohybu*, p. 106.

<sup>244</sup> V. Havel, “Síla bezsilných”, in: id., *Síla bezsilných i inne eseje*, texts selected by A.S. Jagodziński, Warszawa, 2011, p. 101.

<sup>245</sup> All the associations with voluntary work, survival camps, or even concentration camps must be related both to the fictional history of mobilising teams of soldiers and their trainings in the barracks (the feature no. of Strnad’s film), as well as the system of Spartakiad organisation and effects in the form of shows at the Strahov stadium (the documentary part).

of reaching **understanding of one's being "through body"** and reaching the will to decide one's fate, the bodies of the soldiers promoted to Spartakiad performers are reduced to the **image of an object and sign of sacrifice**. According to Blanka Činátlová, the "ornamental handwriting" of the Spartakiad shows places an *a priori* guilt in the bodies of the performers, as they become a sacrifice made of all that is individual and personal on the altar of the power and the party.<sup>246</sup>

Let us notice, that a characteristic element of Krška's fairy-tales is often a lack of fragmentation in the way male bodies are shown – somewhat paradoxical, as sexualisation is often closely linked to fragmentation;<sup>247</sup> however, in Strnad's film (particularly in the fragments of Spartakiad shows) it is typical to combine eroticising fragmentation with multiplication, monumentalisation, and "bronzing" (sic!) of the bodies. This is connected, among others, with the fact that in the first film we find unconditional admiration, fascination and adoration of the male body (as a whole), while in the second – its banalisation and trivialisation (which are not at all at odds with sexualisation, or the abovementioned monumentalisation, reflecting the dialectic contrasts of the system). Moreover, the male body in *The False Prince* is treated not as decoration but as an autonomous *objet d'art*, while in *The Bronze Boys* it is only an ornament, or even just a non-autonomous no. of an ornament.

In *The False Prince*, there is a conviction about **performativity and fluidity of identity**, sought and realised for own, personal use; the identity of the Spartakiad performers – formatted, typified and **brought to the level of an ideologised body** – works mainly for the "system identity".<sup>248</sup> This also applies to sexual identity and sexuality. Labakan's sexual identity seems unobvious, ambiguous and unstable – and through its performative dimension, destabilising gender, it undermines the social and political order (in this case, totalitarian). However, the sexual identity of "the bronze boys" – although built on not entirely stable and definite premises, and "performed" in a way that is compatible with homosexual fantasies and desires – it moves away from the space of personal freedoms and loses its subversive potential through team training, public performance, and mass display under the dictate of the authorities. This secondary and "façade" taming and bottling up of the unclear and uncertain sexual identity, its channelling into male-to-male barrack and sport relations decreed as normal, paradoxically writes homosexual fantasies into solidifying order and "leads to stabilisation of shaky borders, in order to protect the inside of the system".<sup>249</sup> While the individual and personal fantasy in *The False Prince* plays an emancipatory and liberating role, it has a transgressive and rebellious dimension, in Strnad's world a related fantasy – albeit annexed,

<sup>246</sup> Činátlová, Dederon a stadion, p. 126.

<sup>247</sup> See e.g. observations of Peter Lehman (*Running scared*, pp. 14–19) on the fragmentation of Richard Gere's body in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* (1980).

<sup>248</sup> See Havel, *Siła bezsilnych*, p. 100.

<sup>249</sup> See Jagielski, *Maskarady męskości*, p. 22.

instrumentalised and degenerated – becomes in a tool of social engineering, takes on function of oppression, control, consolidation and normalisation. Krška sublimates homosexual fantasies and on their basis creates a film, which with all its conventional appearances is a contesting creation (a strategy which I would describe as *sublimatio ad liberatum*), while *The Bronze Boys* (as a *pars pro toto* of Spartakiads) use homosexual images and codes for a result opposite to that of *The False Prince*, and deeply conformist.

Krška's "panerotic stylisations"<sup>250</sup> are a performance in itself – disinterested spectacle of masculinity.<sup>251</sup> In *The False Prince*, as in many other works of Krška, we experience a voyeuristic pleasure of watching and contemplating male existence against the background of landscapes or beautiful scenery. At times, sexual impression exerted by the density of male bodies or by charismatic and appealing protagonists is so strong that, in the words of Laura Mulvey, it freezes the course of events in moments of erotic contemplation" and moves the film onto "no man's land [...], outside of time and space".<sup>252</sup> *The False Prince*, as a representation of a fascinated **view of "male-loving men"**<sup>253</sup> – under the circumstances became an articulation of homosexuality. On the other hand, *The Bronze Boys*, in which we deal with a flesh complex directed from above, can be considered a representation of a **view of "men promoting the interests of men"**<sup>254</sup> (which at the same time are "men wielding power"), or an articulation of homosociety. The spectacle of male bodies in the barracks and at the stadium is used here not so much to contemplate, but to "consume",<sup>255</sup> and is not so much negated or contrasted with the narrative<sup>256</sup> of power, but above all intertwined with it and subjected to it. Serving the reproduction of the desired and promoted masculinity, it strengthens the role of authority as "perpetrators of accidents"<sup>257</sup> and perpetuates the normalisation system.

<sup>250</sup> Lukáš Nozar's definition: *Momenty života*, p. 429.

<sup>251</sup> L. Mulvey, "Przyjemność wzrokowa a kino narracyjne", in: *Panorama współczesnej myśli filmowej*, ed. A. Helman, Kraków, 1992, pp. 101–102.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Męskie pragnienie homospołeczne*, p. 180.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> Jagielski, *Maskarady męskości*, p. 44.

<sup>256</sup> Mulvey, *Przyjemność wzrokowa*, p. 101. On the contrast of the "spectacle" and "narrative" see also: Elsaesser, *Nowa Historia Filmu*, p. 14. In *The Bronze Boys* and, to a lesser extent, in other films of the Spartakiad "format", the spectacle elements were heavily intertwined with narrative elements – as in the best *mainstream* works, such as Hollywood musicals. This can be seen as an adaptation of strategies used in Stalinist times in popular Soviet cinema productions (e.g. in Grigory Alexandrov's comedies), showing its *embourgeoisement*; see D. Shembel, "The spectacle of masculinity in sports and dance. Grigorii Alexandrov's *The circus and Abram Room's A stern young man* – a paradigm and a pariah", *Blok*, 2004, no. 3, pp. 71–72. The reference to the best practices of Soviet cinema and using its methods is a particular confirmation of the return to socialist realism in Czechoslovak cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, and may indirectly demonstrate the neo-Stalinist character of the normalisation power.

<sup>257</sup> Mulvey, *Przyjemność wzrokowa*, p. 101.

While in the works of Krška there is eroticisation of nature and interdependent “naturalization” of erotica, *The Bronze Boys* are a testament to the eroticisation of ideology and adequate ideologisation of eroticism. Normalisation authorities, unable to exercise control over thoughts, used Spartakiads to separate the body from the thought, and emphasise the former<sup>258</sup> – they aimed to reach thoughts not by negating the body, but by managing it, also (and perhaps above all?) in its sexual dimension. Making sexualisation the ally of objectification and incapacitation was to lead to the emergence of a “new mechanical man” – “the new normalised man”. Haynes claims, referring to the Soviet sociologist and philosopher Igor Kon,<sup>259</sup> that one of the ways in which the Soviet authorities attempted to weaken the personal autonomy of their subjects and de-individualise the individual, was to discredit and root out all that is erotic in human nature (or perhaps even all that is physiological and biological).<sup>260</sup> Therefore he interprets the lack of any sexual tensions and erotic elements in, for example, the musical comedies of Ivan Pyryev as a function of the lack of subjectivity and individual personality in the *homo sovieticus*. Consequently, we could see Krška’s pan-eroticism and its heterogeneous homosexual fantasies as the opposite – **a defence strategy against sovietisation**, and a way to confirm his viewers in their individualisation and sovereignty.

On the other hand, we can perceive *The Bronze Boys* and the Spartakiad projects as proof of **a strategy of de-individualisation and de-autonomisation**, completely different to that described by Kon and Haynes, and which – instead of depreciating and rooting out – does the opposite: makes intensive use of sexualising and exploiting erotic imagination, also homosexual (which I would describe as *condensatio ad absurdum*, and perhaps even *elephantiasis*). The result of this use of and strengthening of erotica turned out to be paradoxical, though most compatible with totalitarian aims. Namely, the bodies displayed at the Spartakiads (but also in the exemplary barracks of Strnad’s film) are Apollonian – young, harmonious, fit and healthy, and highly eroticised, except that they are transformed into bodies which are standardised and dispassionate, into rather dull objects, despite their tempting and potentially lust-arousing attributes. It can be described with the words of Yves Michaud as a “bizarre ubiquity of sex, but without desire, fantasy and passion”, and life without life, in which “some icy materialism prevails – where was [as in Krška] consciousness, soul, fantasy and desire, there is now only the body and its traits”.<sup>261</sup> Spartakiads have thus become a system “not expressing anything erotic, at most designating the place of erotica”.<sup>262</sup> If we were to search for references for this direction in the mainstream Soviet production –

<sup>258</sup> See Thorne, *Těla v pohybu*, pp. 100, 114.

<sup>259</sup> Haynes, *New Soviet man*, p. 185.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Skwara, *Film socrealistyczny*, p. 316.

<sup>261</sup> Y. Michaud, “Wizualizacje. Ciało i sztuki wizualne”, in: *Historia ciała*, vol. 3: *Różne spojrzenia. Wiek XX*, ed. J.-J. Courtine, Gdańsk 2014, p. 409.

<sup>262</sup> Kracauer, *Ornament z ludzkiej masy*, p. 12.

in opposition to the abovementioned Pyryev's musical comedies – a parallel for *The Bronze Boys* could be a series of sports films from the late 1920s and 1930s (in the style of *A Strict Young Man* by Abram Room<sup>263</sup>), in which movement and male physicality, saturated with homoerotic overtones, embodied by dispassionate and “automatic” objects, became a tool for building the communist order and creating the *homo sovieticus*.<sup>264</sup>

Finally, the difference between how homosexual fantasies are realised and operate in *The False Prince*, and how in *The Bronze Boys*, can be seen as an incarnation of the eternal **Eros and Thanatos dichotomy**. Thanatos manifests himself e.g. in the nature of systems in which personal wishes and desires are subordinated to the interests of collective institutions, and in power which includes kinds of automatic – mindless, dispassionate and futile functioning, which are favoured by totalitarian regimes.<sup>265</sup> Thanks to Strnad's film, we can look under the lining of just such a system, in which the complex of male physicality is reduced to a quasi-erotic performance, on the one hand a key link of the “device of sexuality”, on the other – nothing more than a “subsystem of a more ritualised exercise of [communist] power”.<sup>266</sup> This performance and exercise of power are completely resistant to all efforts to transition from once “decreed” utilitarianism and decay to more sublime forms serving individual aims.<sup>267</sup> Krška's films, on the contrary, would constitute the Kingdom of Eros – not only of just (homo)sexuality aiming to satisfy individual ambitions and libido, but also as an elemental force in opposition to the unbearable weight of existence and purpose, such as history, power and all control.

*The False Prince* comes across as an expression of an attitude and a life and art project behind which is “lifestyle” (adding here the adjective “homosexual” would ultimately introduce an unwanted narrowing perspective), or a certain “stylistic of existence”, while *The Bronze Boys*, following communist Spartakiads – with their reduction, de-individualisation, appropriated physicality, and sexual manipulation – they reflect only a “flesh style”.<sup>268</sup> The heart of the mythical “South-Bohemian land” – the home town of Písek, where Krška filmed locations for *The Moon Over the Rive* and *Silvery Wind*, a quarter of a century later was relegated to Strnad's

<sup>263</sup> *Строгий юноша* (1935).

<sup>264</sup> Shembel, *The spectacle of masculinity*, pp. 77, 86 and 88. In those days sports heroes replaced war and revolutionary heroes, and found themselves at the centre of Stalin's propaganda and social engineering. Attractive and erotically valorised (by “saturating with tones of homosexuality”) male body of the athletes played a key role in constructing the social manhood and was central to i.a. the series of about 20 films produced by Sovkino, and devoted to the Spartakiad organised in Moscow since 1928; *ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>265</sup> Johnson, *Eroticism*, p. 53.

<sup>266</sup> So Johnson (*ibid.*) evaluates rituals of power “embodied” in Miklós Jancsó's “film ballets”.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Kracauer, *Ornament z ludzkiej masy*, p. 22.

<sup>268</sup> The definitions of Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir; quote after: J. Butler, “Zapis na ciele, performatywna wywrotowość”, in: *Lektury inności*, p. 44.

prosaic barrack farce.<sup>269</sup> And the young tailor Labakan, fantasizing about being prince Omar, in the times of *The Bronze Boys* would end, like all of Krška's characters marked with otherness, as a Spartakiad soldier at the Strahov Stadium. It is very close to the quarries, in which Joseph K. died "like a dog".

### Degeneration of the Homosexual Phantasm in Normalised Czechoslovak Cinema: from Václav Krška's *The False Prince* (1956) to Stanislav Strnad's *The Bronze Boys* (1980)

#### Abstract

The author – inspired by the notion of "phantasm" as proposed by Maria Janion, and using the concepts of, among others, German Ritz (the poetics of inexpressible homosexual desire and "complex of corporality"), Marc Ferro (film as a symptom revealing the "hidden side" of power and society) and Michel Foucault ("arrangement of sexuality") – examines the attitude of Czechoslovak cinema towards male nudity and sexuality in a broader context of socio-political history and filmmaking in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War.

An analysis, centred on two films: the *Labakan (The False Prince)* by Václav Krška (1956), and *Kluci z bronzu (Boys of Bronze)* by Stanislav Strnad (1980), is to comparatively examine how homosexual phantasms were sublimated and transferred to the screen in two historical moments – in the second half of the fifties, i.e. when the country was going out of the Stalinist and socialist realism period, and at the turn of the eighties, that is in the middle of the period of normalization and the regime of Gustáv Husák. The main purpose of the analysis is to examine a symptomatic change in quality – called by Szymański as "degeneration" – of the way in which homosexual imaginations were disclosed and functioned in films, that reflected their appropriation, "reorientation" and exploitation by the totalitarian authorities.

In the rich literary, dramatic and film achievements of Krška we find many homosexual "hidden signals" as well as clear connotations and indications, expressing themselves in, among other things, spectacularization and erotization of the male body, a peculiar construct of protagonists-outsiders, questioning of gender stereotypes, stylisation modelled on antiquity, oriental or expressionistic one, etc. Special place in his creativity is occupied by the Czechoslovak-Bulgarian film super-production titled *Labakan (The False Prince)*, in which the adaptation of the fairy tale about a tailor's apprentice who wanted to take the place of the vizier's son became for the director a vehicle for his personal, author's commentary. The homosexual (homotextual) character of Krška's film reveals itself in its transgressive plot open to a "double reading", in its specific pansexuality and the "complex of male corporality", governed by the logic of covetous look, and in the paracamp aesthetic associated today with queer style. In Szymański's opinion, the materialization of homosexual phantasms on the screen offered both for the author and the spectators an area of freedom and "artistry of life": on the one hand it offered them shelter and was an escape from the oppressive cultural reality, on the other – it was becoming the means to contest and the practice of resistance to the heteronormative and totalitarian world.

Whereas a barracks-sports farce titled *Kluci z bronzu (Boys of Bronze)* by Stanislav Strnad belongs to a bigger group of films which in this popular form were taking up the subject of

<sup>269</sup> On Písek as the place where the films were made: *Český hraný film VI*, p. 182; and <http://www.csfd.cz/film/5370-mesic-nad-rekou/prehled/>, and <http://www.csfd.cz/film/27293-stribrny-vitr/prehled/> (access: 13 March 2016).

exceptional and unique on the world scale events – Czechoslovak Spartakiads, with their most spectacular part in the form of mass gymnastic compositions performed at the Strahov Stadium in Prague. The fictional history of soldiers, who – overcoming their limitations and reverses of fortune, were preparing a composition of artistic gymnastics for the Spartakiads, was combined with documental shots of the real performing sports compositions at the Strahov in 1980. It inscribes into the normalized film “formats”, that is the tested and “patented” stylistic and genre formulas used by the authorities as “soft” means of propaganda and indoctrination. The way in which Strnad presents military and sport homosocial relations, together with a domination in the film of the element of masculinity and the specific “complex of male corporality”, imply some special interrelation between the erotisation of the male body, ideological directives, and political needs. What is more, according to Szymański, they also indicate that the purpose of the communist authorities was not only the “standard” creation and propagation of “appropriate” models of “real” masculinity, but also such shaping of male corporality and eroticism that they would support the existing political order instead of subverting it, and replicate the normalized “arrangement of sexuality”.

In this context the author looks closely at the Spartakiada’s mass gymnastic exercises demonstrated by male gymnasts, and especially at the hugely popular shows performed by almost fourteen thousand of half-naked soldiers, which were an unprecedented in the communist public space celebration of male physicality and sensuality, characterised by special idealisation and aestheticisation, outstanding choreography and spectacular figures of the performers, erotic dialectics of clothes and nudity, and the condensation of tension which was gradually and sophisticatedly built.

In these shows, the instrumentalisation of gender and eroticism, characteristic of Spartakiads in general, was followed by the instrumentalisation of codes of homosexual look and desire, neutralisation of inversive connotations – were harnessed for the use of normalization.

Homosexual phantasms which in the time of Krška could have been a stimulant of personal expression and practice of opposition, and at least an internal shelter and refuge, twenty years later were appropriated, manipulated and instrumentalised by the communist authorities, becoming part of their system normalizing procedures, a tool for ordering or “arranging sexuality” in accordance with political lines, and an instrument of self-totalitaring and self-harnessing actions.

## Дегенерация гомосексуального фантазма в нормализованном чехословацком кинематографе. От «Лабакана» Вацлава Кршки (1956) до «Парней из бронзы» Станислава Стрнада (1980)

### Аннотация

Вдохновившись понятием «фантазма» в понимании Марии Янион, а также пользуясь концепциями, между прочим, Германа Ритца (поэтика невысказанного гомосексуального влечения и «комплекс телесности»), Марка Ферро (фильм как симптом, раскрывающий «тайную сторону» власти и общества) и Мишеля Фуко («диспозитив сексуальности») автор исследует отношение чехословацкого кинематографа к мужской наготы и сексуальности в более широком контексте социально-политической истории, а также чехословацкого кинематографического производства после Второй мировой войны.

Анализ, сосредоточен на двух лентах: «Лабакан» Вацлава Кршки (1956) и «Парни из бронзы» Станислава Стрнада (1980). Он должен послужить сравнительному исследованию того, как были сублимированы и перенесены на экран гомосексуальные фантазмы в двух исторических моментах – во второй половине 1950-х гг., т.е. в период выхода из

сталинизма и соцреализма, а также на рубеже 1970-х и 1980-х гг., т.е. в середине эпохи нормализации и функционирования режима Густава Гусака. Главной целью исследования является прослеживание симптоматичного качественного преобразования того, каким образом раскрываются и функционируют в кино гомосексуальные изображения (в определении Шиманского «дегенерации»). что отражает их присвоение, «перенаправление» и использование тоталитарной властью.

В богатом литературном, театральном и кинематографическом творчестве Кршки мы находим многочисленные «тайные сигналы», а также отчетливые гомоэротические коннотации и подтексты, проявившиеся, между прочим, в spectacularизации и эротизации мужского тела, своеобразной конструкции героев-аутсайдеров, опровержении половых стереотипов, антикизирующей, ориентальной или экспрессионистской итп. стилизации. В его творчестве особое место занимает чехословацко-болгарская суперпродукция «Лабакан» – адаптация романтической сказки о портном-подмастерье, мечтавшем занять место сына визира, ставшая для режиссера средством личного, авторского высказывания. В трансгрессивной, фабуле с возможным «двойным прочтением», в специфическом пансексуализме и «комплексе мужской телесности», которым правит логика жаждущего взгляда, а также в паракэмповой эстетике, ассоциирующейся сегодня с квинной стилистикой, проявляется гомосексуальный (гомотекстуальный) характер произведения Кршки. Согласно Шиманскому, материализация гомосексуальных фантазмов на экране создавала (как для художника, так и для потребителей картины) пространство свободы и «артизма жизни». С одной стороны она дарила им убежище и была средством ухода от угнетающей культурной действительности, а с другой – превращалась в выражение протеста и практикой сопротивления гетеронормативному и тоталитарному миру. Казарменно-спортивный фарс «Парни из бронзы», в свою очередь, принадлежит к более обширной группе произведений, затрагивавших в популярном киножанре тему мероприятий, исключительных в мировом масштабе – чехословацких спартакиад. Их самой зрелищной частью были массовые гимнастические показы, организованные каждые 5 лет на пражском Страговском стадионе. История воинской части, солдаты которой, побеждая собственные слабости и превратности судьбы, подготавливают спартакиадную гимнастическую комбинацию, смонтирована с документальными съемками настоящих показов на Страгове в 1980 году. Она вписывается в кинематографические «форматы» периода нормализации, то есть проверенные и «запатентованные» стилистико-жанровые формулы, которыми власти пользовались для «мягкой» пропаганды и индоктринации. Способ презентации Страном армейских и спортивных гомообщественных отношений, а также доминирующая в картине стихия мужественности и связанный с ней специфический «комплекс телесности», указывают на своеобразную связь эротизации мужского тела с идеологическими директивами и политическими потребностями. Более того, согласно Шиманскому, они свидетельствуют и о том, что целью коммунистических властей было не только «стандартное» формирование и распространение «правильных» эталонов «настоящей» мужественности, но и такая обработка мужской телесности и эротики, чтобы они, вместо субверсивно подрывать существующий порядок, поддерживали его и воспроизводили нормализованный «диспозитив сексуальности».

В этом контексте автор внимательнее присматривается к спартакиадным выступлениям гимнастов, особенно к пользующимся огромным успехом показам, в которых участвовало почти 14 000 полубоюженных солдат. Они были беспрецедентным в коммунистическом общественном пространстве чувством мужских телесности и чувственности, отличавшимся и особенными идеализацией эстетизацией, интересными хореографическими решениями и позами упражняющихся, эротической диалектикой прикрытия и обнаженности, а также изощренным сгущением драматического накала. В этих зрелищах, вслед за инструментализацией гендера и эротики, характерной для

спартакиад в целом, пошла и инструментализация кодов гомосексуального взгляда и влечения, а также свойственного им воображариума, которые – после замены знаков местами и нейтрализации инверсионных коннотаций – использовались нормализационным правительством.

Гомосексуальные фантазмы во времена Кршки могли еще служить стимулом для личной экспрессии и практикой сопротивления, или, хотя бы, внутренним убежищем и уходом. Двадцать лет спустя они оказались присвоены, сманипулированы и инструментализированы властью, превратившись в часть ее системных нормализующих процедур, орудие «диспозитива сексуальности», соответствующего политическим требованиям, а также инструмент самототализующих и укрощающих действий.

Перевод Агнешка Поспишилль

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