

Jindřiška Bláhová, ed., **Proplétání světů. Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary v období studené války**. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2023. 523 pages. ISBN 978-80-7004-201-4.

While the film festivals in Cannes or Venice belong to the world's most iconic cultural events, their Czech (respectively Czechoslovak) counterpart – Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) – stands on the peripheries of both film history and the contemporary film world, despite holding the same “A” category awarded by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF). Until the film historian Jindřiška Bláhová published the compelling anthology *Proplétání světů: Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary v období studené války* [Intertwining Worlds. Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Cold War Era], the history of the socialist festival did not seem very interesting. Founded already in 1946, after communism the festival started to be portrayed as a politically discredited institution that obstructed the development of an actually progressive and internationally relevant film forum. Bláhová and her colleagues, who come from a diverse range of fields, made an enormous effort to scrape the extremely reductive sticker off. Not only did they succeed, but they also managed to replace it with an inclusive transnational picture, which invites further exploration.

The anthology comprises of seventeen studies that are divided into four thematic blocks – I. Between nations: European festival culture, vision of internationalism and looking for audience; II. Inside the Eastern bloc: Progressive film, zone of contact and socialist modernity; III. East-West/West-East: Festival politics, cultural transfer and socialist consumerist culture; and IV. World: Socialist internationalism, Hollywood and Global South. The decision not to follow chronological order – the studies cover the period between 1946–90 – is easily defensible as it would be much harder if not impossible to capture different types of festival's periodizations and different functions it served for various actors. Yet the introductory and final chapters hold the book together. Bláhová opens it with a study dedicated to the first two pre-communist festival editions of 1946 and 1947. Vítězslav Sommer's closes it with a one on the transition period of late 1980s and early 1990s. Hence, even if not all seams between the thematic blocks are perfect and one needs a moment to get back to realities of Stalinism (p. 306) after some hundred pages dominantly focused on 1960s, the pleasure from discovering new conceptual prisms compensates the effort.

An issue harder to overlook concerns the fluctuating quality of individual studies. Those with a clear thesis and well-arranged structure, such as the ones of Jindřiška Bláhová, Lukáš Skupa, Martin Franc, Richard Nowell, or Elena Razlogova, stand next to those that clearly suffer from a lack of editing. Their informative and interpretative value is not necessarily lower, though. Yet the overall approachability of the book relies on the exceptional story-telling abilities of Bláhová, who also works as a journalist, and on a few other studies that, apart from being well-researched, are also well-written. Editorial changes would be needed for the book to resonate with an international academic audience.

How is it possible that KVIFF witnessed neither the rise of the Polish Film School (Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and others) nor of the Czechoslovak New Wave (Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Ivan Passer, and others)? Studies by Jaromír Blažejovský, who inspects the fate of individual national cinematographies at the festival, and Jakub Jiříšťa and Lukáš Skupa, who shed light on KVIFF in the late 1960s, meet to make one of the most interesting points of the book. The problem the festival struggled with from the very beginning – a lack of best-quality movies that both Western and Eastern European countries were sending to more prestigious competitions in Cannes or Venice instead – caught up with the organizers when movies by Forman or Menzel ended up in the West as well. The reasons were political, economic, and strategic. The symbolic value of the victory in Western European competitions was much higher, as it qualitatively equalized the often-underestimated production of socialist countries. The different pace of regimes' easing after Stalin's death played its role as well. Little praise for Andrzej Munk's *Man on the Tracks* at the festival in 1957 sent a clear sign that for the Czechoslovak establishment, Poles were too progressive too soon. New important titles travelled to the West in the future.

Also, the Western trophies went hand in hand with substantial financial rewards; those were obviously appreciated both by socialist states and artists. The last factor concerned KVIFF's ongoing effort to maintain the "A" category awarded by FIAPF and eventually to permanently keep it (study by David Čeněk). Apart from other demands (such as distancing from politics), this was conditioned by the festival's profile as a prestigious international film forum as opposed to a parade of domestic production. Despite much anticipation by foreign filmmakers, the best Czechoslovak films of the twentieth century were mostly not part of the main competition program at KVIFF, and their screenings took place in small, insufficient screening rooms.

While KVIFF had no interest and, at the same time, could not set itself apart from the rival competitions by building its reputation on the quality of Czechoslovak New Wave (and possibly other Eastern European cinematographies), it became unique and successful in a different area. Bláhová focuses on the alternative festival model during the Stalinist era, which was closely linked to the World Peace Movement, and shows that the straitjacket of socialist ideology might in many ways have limited the festival, but it also provided it with a coherent social and political course (p. 325). Starting the Free Platform in 1958 and the Symposium of Young and New Cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in 1962 were part of the festival's progressive heading. Elena Razlogova takes up Bláhová's story and captures KVIFF as the first festival that provided a thorough discussion platform for filmmakers of the Global South. KVIFF helped discover Indian films and Brazilian Cinema Novo and gave a space to Chinese, Cuban, and North Vietnamese films that were banned from all Western competitions for political reasons. It is Razlogova's study that brings a completely new chronology into the festival's history. What were dark hours of Soviet domination for Eastern Europeans was a period of awakening and hope of liberation from Western imperialism and colonialism for nations of the Global South.

On the other hand, the late 1960s were a turning point in the North but mattered little in the South.

The rest of the studies provide more individualized findings. Martin Franc focuses on guest care and the organization of hosts' free time. Modest post-war conditions at the once lavish spa resort, which was now located in an economically deprived borderland, improved only slowly. The attempts to match Western standards were often met with ridicule. An American journalist, who regularly reported from Karlovy Vary to the American cultural magazine *Variety*, described his festival experience as "painful" (p. 298). Yet even the American approach to the festival was not unified. Richard Nowell shows both the stereotypical framing of the festival on the pages of *Variety* and Hollywood's pragmatic strategy of choosing internationally oriented, progressive, middlebrow, and feminist films for KVIFF. Thus, he can conclude that Hollywood was not as unwaveringly anti-communist during the Cold War as it is understood to be. Similar ideological flexibility is described by Bláhová and Ewa Ciszewska, who explore the socialist appropriation of the concept of stardom. By drawing attention to actresses' artistic performance, approachability, and lack of cheaply displayed sexuality, socialists distanced themselves from the capitalist usage of the concept. Yet, the festival magazines were still full of sexualized images of visiting female artists, as their physical beauty mediated Western modernity.

Even though a few editing decisions can be criticized, Bláhová's anthology is thought-provoking, and its core theses are refreshingly bold. In the past, many interesting phenomena linked to pre-1990 KVIFF fell into regretful oblivion due to the blanket condemnation of everything that was tied to state socialism. Bláhová and her colleagues revisit the first twenty-seven editions of the festival and look at them through the eyes of a myriad of actors: Czech organizers, foreign directors, actors and producers, Hollywood, the Eastern Bloc, and, importantly, the Global South. It is a great example of transnational approach to history Czech academia only recently started to flirt with.

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