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Picturing the Nation: Slovak National Identity in the Age
of the Mass Produced Image

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identita v době mass produced image

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1.1 ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the role that the mass produced image (e.g. lithographs, photographs, and cinema) played in the creation and solidification of Slovak national and ethnic identity not only among Slovaks living in Slovakia, but also Slovaks living abroad in America from the 19th to the mid-20th centuries. Given the problems inherent in using the written Slovak language to form a sense of national and ethnic unity, Slovak culture drew widely on visual sources that could be rapidly reproduced, easily transmitted in Slovakia and abroad, and were affordable to a wide variety of social and economic classes. This dissertation also focuses on some of the problems of this approach which will require further study and examination.

Keywords: Slovakia, Slovak nationalism, ethnic identity, photography, lithography, cinema, ethnography, mass media,

1.1 ANOTACE

Disertační práce se zaměřuje na funkci, kterou hromadně reprodukované obrazy (mass produced image), jako např. kamenotisk, fotografie nebo film, měly při vytváření a upěvnování slovenské národní a etnické identity od devatenáctého století do poloviny století dvacátého, a to nejen mezi Slováky, ale také mezi slovenskými emigranty žijícími v Americe. Vzhledem k vysoké míře negramotnosti a dalším problémům spojených s používáním psané slovenštiny se slovenská kultura při zrodu národní a etnické jednoty opírala zejména o vizuální zdroje, které bylo možné rychle reprodukovat, snadno šířit doma i v zahraničí a jež byly jednoduše dostupné napříč různými sociálními a ekonomickými třídami. Disertace rovněž problematizuje samotnou metodu a klade si otázky, které mají podnítit k dalším výzkumům.

Klíčová slova: Slovensko, slovenský nacionálismus, národní identita, etnická identita, kamenotisk, film, národopis, fotografie, masmédiá

2. Summary of the Dissertation

This dissertation, *Picturing the Nation: Slovak National Identity in the Age of the Mass Produced Image*, emerged out of one key observation: that Slovak ethnic identity and Slovak nationalism did not fit the more established models of nationalism and ethnic awareness found elsewhere in Europe; they did not emerge out of a national linguistic revival, as had been the case with neighboring Czechs, nor was they an evolution of political and economic power over other peoples and regions, as had been the case with Hungarians and Austrians. Rather, Slovak national and ethnic identity emerged in concert with an unprecedented technological revolution in the field of visual arts—the birth of the mass produced image. The mass produced image is my own coinage for the easily reproducible, affordable, accessible, and (most importantly) portable artistic technologies that emerged in the late 18th century and gained prominence through the 19th and early 20th centuries: lithography, photography, and cinema. While traditional models of ethnic nationalism and ethnic awakenings often focus on the literary canon of a given nation, or the revival of a declining language, during this same period (late 18th through early-20th centuries), Slovaks were neither predominantly literate, nor particularly unified regarding their own identities, often arguing amongst themselves over the very grammatical foundation of the language which would eventually be codified as *spisovná slovenčina*, before the Hungarian authorities marginalized the usage of minority languages in the 1860s. Furthermore, as I discovered in my research, one of the driving factors of Slovak identity was not a historical attachment to the idea of a “Slovakia” (a 20th century creation), but instead the massive Slovak diaspora of the 19th and 20th centuries, which saw millions of Slovaks emigrate from the lands of the Hungarian crown to the United States, where many encountered Slovaks from different regions, speaking and writing different dialects of Slovak, and often maintaining different religious and cultural rit-

uals. Thus, the simple question remained: if Slovaks faced such difficulties unifying as a people in both the Slovak Lands and abroad, how did they manage to do so, as we well know today?

In order to answer this simple question, this dissertation traces how the mass produced image was able to avoid the problems associated with more “traditional” means of forming ethnic unity (language, literature) and instead, added a visual component to the process of identity formation which allowed the mass produced image to travel, often wordlessly, among far-flung Slovak communities in ways that were accessible for all social classes. While I do not claim that Slovak ethnic and national identity were formed solely through the usage of these mass produced images, the fact remains that they often worked in concert with other traditional forms of ethnic identity, which other scholars (such as Alexander Maxwell) have noted were weaker in Slovakia than elsewhere. Finally, although the mass produced image remains a vital part of our global international culture, I have decided to focus my dissertation on the period leading up to the closure of the Czechoslovak borders in 1953, with one exception that shall be explained in more detail below.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters, each dealing with a specific realm of the mass produced image in (roughly) chronological order. The first chapter deals with the concept of the mass produced image, its history and phenomenology, and how one might use this concept in other contexts, should there be any interest in it. The second chapter details the emergence of lithography and photography in the Slovak Lands in the 19th century and how these two new media helped establish the limits and boundaries of not just Slovak identity, but also aided in establishing the future Slovakia in public consciousness. The third chapter deals with Slovak non-fiction filmmaking, which had its genesis in the ethnographic aims of elites in the Kingdom of Hungary, but was quickly adopted by Slovaks in Slovakia and abroad as an educational, as well

as artistic medium. This chapter also deals with Slovakia's exotic appeal to Czech filmmakers such as Karel Plicka, who saw Slovakia's underdeveloped countryside as an idyllic repository of older Slavic culture which had been displaced by modernization elsewhere in Czechoslovakia. The fourth chapter examines Slovak feature filmmaking, whose roots lie not in Slovakia, but in the American cities of Chicago and Pittsburgh, where Slovak Americans saw cinema as a means of resisting the pressures of assimilation as well as a means to connect with their ancestral homeland. This chapter also deals with the growing political pressure in Czechoslovakia regarding the "Slovak Question" and the sundering of the Slovak American and Czechoslovak Slovak community following Slovakia's secession and declaration of war against the United States in 1941. The fifth chapter is a more broadly theoretical chapter dealing with mass produced images and their usage in promoting two very different kinds of "national hero" among Slovaks— General Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Juraj Jánošík. The final chapter of the dissertation deals with the gradual shift away from the mass produced image as a factor in ethnic and national identity following the closure of the Czechoslovak borders in 1953 as well as attempting to grapple with some of the problematic aspects of this theory. This final chapter also emphasizes how the changing artistic, political, and social climate of 1960s Czechoslovakia further altered the mass produced image's role in Slovak identity with the emergence of the Slovak New Wave.

3. Theoretical Framework

Given that the thesis focuses on my conception of the mass produced image, it is necessary to explain what this is. As I mentioned in the summary of the dissertation, due to their unique provenances, Slovak nationalism and ethnic identity are inextricably tied to the phenomenon of the mass produced image, a term of my own creation. A mass produced image, is, in its most simple reduction, any image (moving or stationary) in a variety of media which satisfies three simple criteria: 1) the image itself can be duplicated with little to no loss of fidelity, 2) this duplication can produce a great (if not infinite) amount of copies, and 3) the resulting image copies can be cheaply, easily, and widely distributed. As I mentioned above, the technological changes which gave birth to the mass produced image also introduced new modes of perception of images, as well as new phenomenological responses to the images themselves, which are then inserted into the public consciousness as models for identity. The replicability and the reproducibility of these images means that they can and will circulate among populations, increasing their influence.

The theoretical framework for this concept of the mass produced image stems from my research in the phenomenology of mass media, more specifically the work of the theorists and philosophers Jean Baudrillard, Roman Ingarden, Edmund Husserl, and Roland Barthes. Furthermore, as it draws on concepts and tools from disciplines outside of cinema and media studies, the mass produced image is a relatively flexible theoretical tool which can be used in a variety of contexts. However, it should be stressed that as the mass produced image is entirely of my entirely my devising, it requires further testing and peer review to judge its ultimate applicability as a theoretical tool.

4. Methodology of the Work

In both the field of nationalism studies and studies of Slovak ethnic identity most contemporary research is centered around the linguistic aspects of these two fields, although some researchers (such as Robert M. Zecker) also touch on the anthropological aspects as well. However, while such prior research has been a great aid in the completion of this dissertation, as stated in the summary, these more focused approaches are less optimal when examining the hybrid natures of Slovak nationalism and ethnic identity—two concepts which were created, in part, through a dialogue between expatriate communities and their brethren in the home country, and transmitted via a range of non-literary materials. Similarly, much of the scholarly work previously done on Slovak cinema and Slovak film culture is focused on the output of the later periods of Slovak cinema, with the notable exceptions of the work of Petra Hanáková and Peter Mihálik among others, and furthermore, very little work has been done on the American Slovak communities' roles in the propagation of Slovak cinema among Slovak communities elsewhere prior to World War II. Given these gaps in the field, it was a logical choice to tailor this dissertation with the express aim of filling in some of these omissions in the scholarly record. Although this dissertation in no way, shape, or form completely rectifies this situation, I believe it provides a foundation for myself and other researchers to begin further explorations in this area.

Thus, in order to deal with a subject as hybrid as Slovak identity, an interdisciplinary approach is often the most rewarding. With this aim in mind, *Picturing the Nation* aims to combine elements from several disparate fields (art history, cinema and media studies, phenomenology, and history) in order to synthesize a workable model for this simple-yet-complicated phenomenon. The use of my concept of the mass produced image allows me to draw on these fields si-

multaneously, while avoiding the pitfalls of a purely theoretical approach via a solid framework in the best historiographical practices currently available. This dissertation's research is founded upon several years of archival research in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the United States (specifically in the Slovak Institute in Cleveland, Ohio and the University of Pittsburgh's numerous Slovak history archives and local historical collections), and seeks to combine creative and theoretical analysis, with fundamentally solid historiography. Although some chapters have subsections dealing with individual films in the manner of a more traditional film history dissertation, the intent here is to show how one can use theory of the mass produced image to analyze concrete cinematic outputs, as well as to relate the production of these films to earlier precursors in the historical strata. Likewise, the chapters dedicated to the historical evolution of both a given mass produced medium and Slovak identity are intended to reveal the links between processes which have normally been excluded from the standard historiography of Slovak cinema.

5. Conclusions

Throughout this dissertation I have shown that one of the key influencing factors on Slovak national identity has been the mass produced image—lithographs, photographs, postcards, stamps, and films—which were transmitted internally between Slovak communities worldwide, as well as exported to outside groups such as Czechs and Hungarians. Although these mass produced images have long been ignored in the traditional models for the development of nationalist sentiment, national awakenings, and ethnic/national identity, they became crucial components in the development of Slovak national and ethnic identity, which did not align with many, if any, of the traditional components outlined in other models. The mass produced image allowed Slovaks in the Slovak Lands to disseminate national ideas, concepts of ethnic unity, and most impor-

tantly, establish the liminal boundaries of both the Slovak identity (as both a *národ* and an *ethnos*) as well as to establish the psycho-geographic boundaries of a future Slovakia, a country yet to exist, in ways that were able to skirt the political and social pressures in the Kingdom of Hungary and interwar Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the mass produced image also allowed Slovaks living abroad to form an idea of Slovakness in exile, during periods of mass immigration from the Slovak Lands to America, and eventually also to maintain a sense of Slovak identity while geographically removed from Slovakia itself. And finally, the mass produced image also allowed Americans of Slovak ancestry to influence the formation and the maintainence of these national and ethnic identities through their participation in the production, consumption, and exchange of Slovak mass produced images manufactured, whether manufactured in Slovakia or America.

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“Zvýšte slovenskú filmovú produkciu! (po úspechu slovenského filmu v Amerike)” *Slovák*, June 19th, 1938.

7. Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

- A.M. 2012 University of Chicago, Slavic Languages and Literatures
A.B. 2003 University of Chicago, English Language and Literature

PUBLICATION ACTIVITIES

PEER REVIEWED:

“That Intense Lyricism: A Brief History of Slovak Cinema From Its Inception To the New Wave” published in *16x9*: <http://www.16-9.dk/2016/11/that-intense-lyricism/>

“A Nation of Orphans: Changing Attitudes Towards Ethnic Identity in Slovak Film From 1968 to 1969,” forthcoming, *Slovakia*, 2020 (submitted)

EDITOR SELECTED:

“Seeing the Truth Through Smoked Glass- A Meditation on Štefan Uher’s The Sun in a Net, Adaptation, and Identity,” published in: *East European Film Bulletin*: <https://eefb.org/archive/october-2014/the-sun-in-a-net/>

“Disarming the Bandit – Pacho, Brigand of Hybe and the Attempt to Neutralize an Ethnic Symbol,” published in: *East European Film Bulletin* : <https://eefb.org/archive/march-2015/pacho-brigand-of-hybe/>

ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

SELECTED TRANSLATIONS AND EDITING:

Translator and copy editor: Kateřina Svatoňová, Lucie Česálková, *Laterna Magika - dekonstrukce a aktualizace*, Brno/Praha, 2019.

English Language translator and copy-editor: ArteActa, 2019-2020

Translator: Jan Trnka, *The Czech Film Archive 1943 - 1993: Institutional Development and Problems of Praxis*. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2018.

Translator: Petr Szczepanik, “The Coming of Sound Film in Czechoslovakia, Popular Song, and the Media Culture of the 1930s” [edited version of his 2009 monograph] 2018.

English language copy editor Jana Dudková, Katarína Mišíková, [editors]. *Transformation Processes in Post-Socialist Screen Media*, Bratislava: Vysoká škola múzických umení, 2017.

Simultaneous translation and interpretation: “The Long 1990s: The Sixth Annual Screen Industries in East Central Europe Conference”, Prague 2016

Translation and editing: *Slova a Smysl*, Summer 2016.

English language copy editing : Kateřina Svatoňová, *Mezi-obrazy: Mediální praktiky kameramana Jaroslava Kučery*, Praha: Narodní filmový archív, 2016.

SELECTED CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES:

“The Manly Art(s): Boxing and Changing Concepts of Slovak Masculine Identity in Film from 1962 to 2015,” ATSEEEL Convention, 2019

“A Nation of Orphans: Changing Attitudes Towards Ethnic Identity in Slovak Film From 1968 to 1969,” ASEES Convention, 2018

“Obrazy národu, aneb: vytvoření slovenské kulturní identity prostřednictvím mass produced image”, XI. Dokorandská konference FAV Brno, 2017

“The Bandit and the Aviator : Juraj Jánošík, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, and the Formation of Slovak Identity in the Realm of the Mass Produced Image,” BASEES Convention, 2017

“Slovak Traditions, Modern Techniques: Martin Frič, Karel Plicka, and the Search for a Modernist (Czecho)Slovak Identity,” ASEES Convention, 2017

“Men of the Mountains: Traditional Slovak Visual Culture in Cinema,” Univerzita Karlova, Space in Two Dimensions Post-Graduate Workshop, 2015

“A People Carved Out of Wood : Slovak Documentary Films of the 1960’s and 1970’s and the Search for Slovak Identity”, University of Southampton and SCREEN Present: Contemporary Central and South-East European Cinema in Transition: A Postgraduate Symposium, 2014

“National Identity in Slovak Visual Culture” NECS Conference, 2013

“Imaging and Re-imagining Václavák : Wenceslaus Square as a Nexus of Czech Visual Culture and National Identity” ASEES Convention, 2013

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES**ECES/FFUK/KFS:**

2013 - Present - *Politics, Culture and Visuality: Czech and Slovak Cinema from 1950 to Present*

2014 Spring - *The Camera Eye Never Lies: Avant-Garde Documentaries*

2015 Summer, 2016 Summer, 2020 Summer - *Picturing the Nation : National Filmmaking and Czech and Slovak Visual Culture*

2017 Winter - *The Photographic Image in Central Europe*

2018 Winter, 2019 Summer - *High Brow to Low Brow: Genre in Central European Cinema*

2019 Winter - *Red Planets: Science Fiction in Central European Cinema and Literature*

2019 Winter - Present : *Waves of the Future: Czech and Slovak New Wave Cinema*

FAMU INTERNATIONAL:

2014-Present - *Central European Cinemas in Context* (YBAC007)

2019-Present - Opponent for M.A. theses in FAMU International

2020- Preparatory lectures for the State Exams

CIEE/ÚJOP:

2019 Winter - *Czech Cinema 1890 to Present*

2020 Summer - *The Uses and Misuses of Propaganda in European Cinema*

CET / FAMU:

2019 Winter- *Central European Cinemas*